

LOVE'S INFERNO



EDWARD STILGEBAUER



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LOVE'S INFERNO

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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BOOK I
THE ANTE-HELL

CHAPTER I

ATTENTION BACKWARD TURNED

“THE Emperor has ordered general mobilisation !” Skipper Yobst shouted the pregnant news from his toothless mouth to his chum Muehlkell, as the logs forming their rafts nearly touched.

Yobst came from far away. He had started on his hard job at Schweinfurt-on-the-Main, steering down the Rhine the rope-bound fir trunks from the Spessart heights. He had passed Aschaffenburg, Frankfort, and Hoechst, and was just swinging into the green glimmer of the flowing waves of the great Rhine. No human voice had reached him from either bank ; and it was only this morning, breakfasting at an inn at Ruedesheim, that he had heard the news which for days had made the nations of both hemispheres hold their breath.

“Did he, then ?” shouted back Muehlkell from his raft at the top of his voice. He was standing on trunks that had been lying at Ruedesheim and were now towed up the river by a steam tug ; for higher up is Schwanheim where timber was needed, and the large forest along the Main lacked serviceable firs. Muehlkell’s voice rang out clear and loud, but utterly unconcerned. He came from Rotterdam. Hard work on the water had long ago benumbed his soul ; he was tired, the Netherland clay between his teeth was cold.

“ Did he, then ? ” he said once more. And the rafts slipped by each other, one from the shores of the sea, the other from the mountains of Bavaria. Across the river whose waves, gleaming under a burning August sun, reflected the ancient cathedral of the city of electors and archbishops, resounded the Bavarian salutation, “ Guard thee God ! ”

The streets of the cathedral-town were throbbing with life. From the close-set barracks swarmed battalion after battalion ; incessantly grew the flood that was to submerge France ; before twenty-four hours had passed the city on the Rhine had poured forth an entire army of fully accoutred warriors. Every dwelling was connected by invisible threads with the barracks ; everywhere packing and fitting out were ceaselessly going on ; everywhere farewells were being said, last words exchanged. In the streets and courts surrounding the venerable cathedral, in the slums where poverty hides, in the villas and palaces along the Rhein-promenade, such invisible threads were vibrating ; the Kaiserstrasse, the web of the whole town, was shaking from its centre to its circumference.

In the Rheinallee stood a pretty house built after the style of an English villa, surrounded by a garden glowing in the splendid light and colour of a glorious summer. Roses swayed on every stalk, clematis clustered over balcony and wall, asters and dahlias lifted their luxuriant blooms to the deep blue sky. Three years ago major von Berkersburg had bought this house from a wealthy manufacturer, who was about to settle in Berlin. Three years ago he entered this house with his young wife at the end of their honeymoon, spent in a country of the midnight-sun.

But Melanie *née* von Falkenstein was more than

twenty years younger than her husband. Her family, aristocratic and once wealthy, with large estates situated near Wirballen close to the Russian frontier, had become more and more impoverished and sunk more and more deeply into debt, while the major, her father's friend and comrade in arms, had become a millionaire by successful speculations in building sites in the suburbs of Berlin.

Melanie von Berkersburg was standing on the balcony of her villa in the luminous August sunshine, unaffected by the clouds that were gathering over the whole world. She was gazing across the Rhine, glittering with a million dazzling flecks of light. Suddenly she opened her arms as if she would embrace and press to her bosom the shores beyond, the wooded mounts of the Taunus.

On the other side begins the "Rheingau" proper; Biberich, Rauenthal, Eltville, Ruedesheim, Assmannshausen—the names flitted through her mind. How often in the evening had they not been there on the other side, in the gay company on board a steamer, listening to the band that was playing now a Volkslied, now a Danube valse, now a Cake-walk, now a French song.

At this thought Melanie passed her hand across her forehead, as if she would chase away a painful dream; French songs played by a German band aboard a Rhine-steamer! How ghastly seemed everything that had happened, that had occurred during these last days! from the events in Serejevo until the end of June, until the ultimatum in Belgrade, and the telegrams from Berlin the day before. And yet it was all real.

French songs!

If Melanie had not known, the carts noisily rumbling past her house would have told her;

carts escorted and driven by soldiers. They came from the depots, taking ammunition to the barracks: rifles, thousands and hundreds of thousands of cartridges, whole wagons full of cartridges.

French songs!

As she looked on, one of Debussy's melodies floated through her mind. When she was a girl of seventeen Melanie spent some time in a boarding-house at Lausanne, and there studied French, literature, and music. There she also met a girl from the Netherlands who became an intimate friend and initiated her into the Netherlands language and its literature. And even after her friend's untimely death Melanie kept up her study of both. That was at the pension of Madame Chevalier, by the lake in Onchy, on the road to Rosemont.

Oh how happy had they been there, she and another friend, Bertha von Amthor, about four years ago, before fate, in the form of major von Berkersburg, came into her young life! She went to Paris with Bertha; via Pontarlier and Dijon they came to the world-famous city on the banks of the Seine. And Bertha had her pocket full of brand-new thousand-franc notes of the Banque de France. Bertha was the daughter of a manufacturer from the Rhine-district near Duisburg, upon whom his Majesty had conferred a title.

That was life, that sojourn in the luxurious Hôtel des Champs Elysées allowed by her father to the two young creatures. It was not much sobered by the tutelage of Miss von Horst-Waldau, a titled lady reduced in circumstances, who had accompanied them to Paris. She acted as a *dame d'honneur* to the two very young German girls

whose high spirits and occasional tricks did not permit her post to become a sinecure.

Paris, the Place de la Concorde, the Jardin des Tuileries, the Champs Elysées !

As the carts rumbled by with their hundreds of thousands of cartridges, Melanie saw with her mind's eye the marvellous picture of the City of Light, and that life full of joy.

And through it all sounded French songs !

There came back to her a melody she had happened to hear from a band in front of one of the big cafés on the Boulevard des Italiens, on a warm spring night. Paris in the spring ! When lads and lasses drive out from the dull streets of the Quartier Montmartre, to the banks of the Seine, where the palaces of fallen kings stand on the green hills.

Paris in the spring ! . . .

The voice of her husband dispelled Melanie's dream. But it was only fancy. The major had been for hours and hours in the barracks, superintending the final arrangements for the transport of his battalion. The next morning at 5.30 the battalion would be entrained and would leave for the frontier.

Bertha von Amthor—how happy had they been then, how merry and light-hearted, two gay, careless young things ! Melanie's friend was in the same position as herself, and yet not in the same. Bertha loved her husband, adored the man whom she had married only six months ago, and to whom she was expecting to give a child. He was in garrison at Bonn, with the royal Hussars. Small wonder, when his father-in-law had accumulated millions upon millions and had been ennobled by his Majesty !

But now !

It was happening to her, it was happening to Bertha, the same was happening in the same way to thousands, tens, hundreds of thousands. Fate was uniting all, levelling all, threatening all, and elating all. To all, all . . . the levelling fate. . . . And Paris the beautiful, the temptress on the banks of the Seine.

Below, a battalion in field-uniforms was filing along the Rheinallee. They passed the villa, their band playing a warlike air. They had decorated with flowers the barrels of their rifles, from which death in a thousand forms would salute the enemy . . . the enemy . . . Paris, Paris, . . . so it all flitted through Melanie's mind.

French songs !

In front of the balcony stood an apricot-tree; ripe golden fruits were hanging amongst the already withering leaves. In the soft spring days of April, pondered Melanie, when no one dreamed of the terrible things now irresistibly preparing, the tree was a bouquet of pink blossoms. It bore this wonderful year, as if it remembered that it ought to perform at least once its duty, neglected during the other summers when she and her husband were living in this house.

Melanie smiled. A thought flashed through her brain. He loved apricots,—he, not the major, her husband, but her friend, the only true friend she had in this town; he who for her sake, she knew, had remained unmarried—Walter Adolf, the captain of the eighth company. Yes, just so, he, he too. . . .

She would have the apricots gathered at once. They would be the golden dessert at supper; for Adolf was coming to supper—the last supper in the “Villa Melanie.” Lustrous apricots from the

Rhine should be the crown of the last supper with her friend . . . yes . . . yes. . . .

Melanie rang for old Mrs. Hof, who had been the major's housekeeper for years during his bachelor life ; and he had insisted upon her retaining her post after his marriage.

CHAPTER II

MY HEART STILL PALPITATES

Mrs. Hof entered the room—a stout, elderly woman whose appearance testified to the easy life she had led in the major's establishment. A dazzling white apron was neatly disposed upon her portly form and accentuated the curves of her spacious waist.

Mrs. Hof worshipped at the right shrine when, fifteen years ago, she entered the house of major von Berkersburg to manage it. While he was a bachelor, spending money like water, her position was an enviable one indeed. And even now she bore patiently and composedly the whims of her young mistress. During the stormy episodes so frequent in unsatisfactory marriages she had her uses, but in peaceful periods her passiveness often seemed to drive the young wife to despair.

The household staff in “Villa Melanie” knew a thing or two about the composure of the factotum who had the ear of the major. Especially did Amélie, the lady's-maid know, whom madame engaged at Paris as *femme de chambre*, a title she preferred here, on the banks of the Rhine. But Albert, the orderly, and Kunz the stable-boy, Josef the coachman, and Aurora, the scullery-maid, whose poetical name was so inappropriate to her work, also had their opinions about Mrs. Hof, for

in the end it was Mrs. Hof, always Mrs. Hof, who carried her points, always Mrs. Hof whose decisions were ratified by the major.

Mrs. Hof's fat face, permanently reddened by the heat of the kitchen fire, bore a look of repressed reproach as she stepped softly over the thick Smyrna carpet to the door opening on to the balcony. She saw, to her disgust, that again there were scraps of paper lying about the carpet. Oh dear, yes! Madam was very young! She indulged her fancies, and Mrs. Hof had the trouble of their consequences. These scraps of paper had been a letter which Melanie had read once more and then torn up, carelessly dropping the bits on the carpet.

Mrs. Hof hated untidiness, and she hated still more those letters. What was the need, Mrs. Hof asked, of having an extensive correspondence if one had married Mrs. Hof's major, lived in a villa on the Rhine, and had merely to nod to set the motor-car running? The housekeeper stooped with difficulty. She carefully picked up the scraps of paper from the carpet, muttering a few words between her teeth, before approaching her young mistress, as always, with a sweet smile.

"Did madam ring?"

Low and leisurely the words fell from Mrs. Hof's lips.

"Certainly."

Mrs. Hof perceived very well that this "certainly" was rather incisive. Therefore she smiled still more sweetly, fully aware that this smile never failed to baffle Melanie. Melanie checked the reproof which had risen to her lips. Of what use to utter it? Things had always been like that since she entered the house as its supposed mis-

truss : so long as Mrs. Hof was the real mistress things always would be like that, unless the war changed this among so much.

Melanie smiled at the thought ; a glimmer of hope played over her face : a glimmer of hope in spite of everything, in spite of the misery of present conditions, of fears that loomed on the horizon, in spite of Adolf's—— She dared not think it out.

She turned to Mrs. Hof and said, in a tone that sounded almost submissive :

"I wanted to ask you, Mrs. Hof, to tell the gardener to gather the apricots from that tree."

Mrs. Hof interrupted her :

"Jacob has been called up, madam ; madam knows ?"

"Oh, of course, Mrs. Hof, Jacob has been called up, and also the——"

"Everybody with sound limbs has been called up, madam."

"Of course, of course, Mrs. Hof. Then you might pick the apricots yourself from the tree ; it is not too tall, and one can reach them without steps. And then serve the apricots for dessert at even-meal to-night."

Melanie had once passed a couple of weeks with her father at Vienna, and she liked the expression "even-meal" so well that she included it in her vocabulary.

Mrs. Hof smiled at Melanie's language ; she took it, as she took everything else, for a sign of coquetry.

"I will pick the apricots myself, madam. Here is a letter for you."

"Give it to me, Mrs. Hof."

Mrs. Hof noticed how hurriedly Melanie took the letter which she had hidden all the time under her large, white apron. Suppressed joy sounded in

Melanie's voice, and Mrs. Hof's smile became nearly painful. "My poor major," flashed through her mind.

Melanie took no further notice of Mrs. Hof. She was too anxious to learn the contents of the letter ; and, like all with a clear conscience, who have nothing to reproach themselves with, the idea of being on guard against others did not enter her mind.

Melanie, quite forgetting Mrs. Hof, stood on the balcony in the radiant August sunshine. The clematis-covered parapet of the verandah, like a frame, threw into relief her slender, girlish figure, clad in sky-blue silk. The taffetas gown was her husband's choice. Sky-blue, he asserted, suited her best, whereas she and some one else were of opinion that neutral tints were most becoming to her pale complexion and copper-coloured hair. She might have been one of the fragile, appealing heroines of Shakespeare's tragedies, a Juliet, a Desdemona, an Ophelia. For as she gazed at her friend's last letter all the mingled feelings surging through her heart—love, anxiety, ecstasy, distress—all were imprinted on her vivid face.

It was his last. On the eve of the departure of his regiment for the front, her vague presentiment deepened to a terrible conviction. Only a few words on a card, like so many notes she had received from him during the past years, since chance—was it chance ? or had he assisted fate ? How often had Melanie asked herself this in hours of quiet but fervent happiness !—since chance had placed him in the same town and in the same regiment as von Berkersburg ?

A plain grey card, only bearing in his monogram his initials, W.A.

Melanie took it from its envelope and read :

“ DEAR FRIEND,

“ Although I am just now frantically busy, I shall make myself free this afternoon, and come for a chat. Greetings.

“ Ever yours,

“ ADOLF.”

“ The dear, dear boy.” Slowly Melanie pressed the card to her lips. Here on the balcony, behind the luxuriant clematis, she might securely permit herself this indulgence. Yonder finch on the swaying fir-branch would hardly object. He chirped at the top of his voice in the warm sunlight, spread his wings, and flew up into the cloudless, serene azure of this day of farewell. God be praised, the finch had no idea of what was happening that day in the beautiful world.

Melanie disappeared into the room. Near the wall there stood a piano, a wonderful Steinway Grand, given to her by her husband one Christmas when he was in a kind and liberal mood. He knew her to be an enthusiastic worshipper of music, and a much better performer than the average amateur ; and he had never been put to the necessity of curbing his or her wishes in this regard ; though, indeed, he himself cared but little for music. Melanie, however gifted, was still an amateur. Adolf was an artist, an artist by the grace of God. Once he had dreamed of attending the Conservatoire, of composing operas, but fate sent him to the military school and to the fighting line. And fate is . . . fate. “ One cannot conquer fate,” as Adolf often said : “ One must submit to the inevitable.”

Melanie stood in front of the splendid instrument.

She opened it, and ran her fingers over the ivory keys, which responded to her caress with richly vibrating chords. She sat down on the music-stool and began to play an accompaniment. It was a composition of Adolf's she was playing; the best, as he contended, that he had accomplished for a long time. The words were by Heine, whom Adolf liked to call his pet poet: "a curious pet poet for a captain of the eighth company," said von Berkersburg. But, nevertheless, the words were by Heine.

Melanie's soprano, clear as a bell, yet retaining a wondrous tenderness in the highest notes, floated through the sunlight-flooded room.

A butterfly had strayed into the room from the bed of asters in the garden, where the sweet juice of the ripe apricots had attracted it. Now it was softly fluttering its wings against the window-pane.

"All hail to thee, thou mighty,
Thou mystic city fair,
That, lapped within thy precincts,
My darling once did bear."

Melanie paused. She gazed thoughtfully at the butterfly struggling helplessly to find its way out, and beating off all the splendour of its wings against the rigid panes. It was like him, she could not help thinking; he, too, could not find the way out; fate forced him to the military school and the barracks, instead of to the Conservatoire and the Opera-house——

"Thou mystic city fair."

So the echo in her heart repeated the words. She thought of Berlin. Was it not at Berlin that she first made his acquaintance in her husband's company? At that time the major was not yet

her husband, but he knew himself to be in high favour with her father who had mortgaged Falkenstein to him ; and he had his eye on the graceful daughter.

It happened in the Royal Opera-house, during a performance of "Tannhauser." Adolf entered their box during an interval, and was introduced to her. Afterwards they had supper together at Adlon's— That was how it came about.

" All hail to thee, thou mighty,
Thou mystic city fair."

Melanie sang again the first stanza of Adolf's composition full of reverence : he had dedicated it to her.

Suddenly the butterfly, finding its way out, darted through the open door-way of the verandah, and, free, fluttered silently into the fragrant garden.

Melanie's large grey eyes followed its flight.

" Thou mystic city fair."

Mrs. Hof knocked at the door.

CHAPTER III

STRONG AND VALIANT

WITH a start Melanie came back to harsh reality. In a quiet voice she said :

“ Come in.”

Mrs. Hof’s slow nasal tones seemed to reach her from a great distance.

“ The porter, madam.”

“ Oh, the porter ! ”

“ He wants to know whether all the luggage shall be sent to Wirballen, as there is no railway station at Falkenstein ? ”

“ Yes, Mrs. Hof, everything is to go to Wirballen.”

“ Three trunks and seven boxes.”

“ Three trunks and seven boxes, Mrs. Hof.”

“ Very well. . . . I’ll tell the porter.”

“ Please do, Mrs. Hof.”

The old woman hesitated a moment at the door, as if she wished to say something.

“ Have you anything else on your mind, Mrs. Hof ? ” asked Melanie.

At last Mrs. Hof replied, with apparent reluctance : “ I am only thinking Wirballen is very near the Russian frontier. Is madam not afraid ? ”

“ I am not afraid, Mrs. Hof ; Falkenstein is half an hour from Wirballen. It is now my duty to be with my father, that is why I go there : when

my husband has left for the front I shall no longer have a home, Mrs. Hof."

She spoke wearily, in a resigned tone of voice.

"That is of course, madam," answered Mrs. Hof, "quite right, but still Wirballen is so very near the Russian frontier."

From a desire to change the subject rather than from any personal interest in Mrs. Hof, Melanie inquired: "And you, Mrs. Hof, have you not heard from your aunt at Volkach?"

"At last, this morning, madam."

"And what does your aunt write?"

"That I may come, and shall be welcome, madam."

"So much the better, Mrs. Hof; then you also leave early to-morrow morning for Volkach?"

"As soon as I can be ready here with everything, madam. I never thought to leave the major's house in this strange way."

"Nor did I, Mrs. Hof . . . but . . ." The words came with a sigh of relief. Mrs. Hof noticed the sigh.

"I hope I have never hindered you in any way, madam?" said she.

Melanie smiled. "Hindered me, Mrs. Hof? Hardly that . . . hindered me in my own house . . . that would have been somewhat curious. . . ."

Mrs. Hof was silent, but she thought, "In the major's house, where you are only tolerated. . . ."

Aloud, she returned: "So I'll tell the porter to send everything to Wirballen."

"Yes, Mrs. Hof."

Melanie sat down at the writing-desk, while Mrs. Hof went to the hall to give the porter the orders of the mistress of the house. Mistress of the house! The idea made her smile pitifully.

Melanie opened a drawer in the desk and turned over a heap of letters which she took from it. One after another she drew from its envelope and began to read. Each letter was torn up after she had read a few words, and the pieces thrown into the waste-paper basket by her side.

All these letters which she had kept for so long, from which she had not been able to part, she knew word for word from the first line to the last. She could not part with them—but now, in these circumstances, one could not keep such letters, could not take them to Wirballen; no one could tell whose booty they might become. And yet, those letters were so innocent, they only told of a love spring-budded and spring-blighted; of a dawning happiness doomed to die before sunrise; of the hopes of a young life withered when von Berkersburg entered upon his relations with Falkenstein.

These were the letters which Adolf wrote from Berlin to Falkenstein, when he asked for her hand, just when, compelled by her father's debts, she had promised to marry the middle-aged major. And now the fragments of those dear and innocent letters were falling into the basket.

At that moment the door opened boisterously. Melanie knew well the quick, heavy step. It was her husband, in khaki: his trousers tucked into his high riding-boots, his rattling sword carelessly dragging across the carpet, he approached the desk.

She did not look up, but she felt the hard stare of his cold blue eyes, under which her long-lashed grey ones had so often fallen submissively. He was always right, he always would be right; he who always arranged everything to his own liking . . . he . . . he . . . Without looking up, she saw too

clearly the weather-beaten face, the stiff grey moustache.

"Remarkably tidy here," Melanie heard; "what are you doing at the writing-desk?"

"I am clearing away the past," she murmured.

"Indeed . . . indeed . . . wait a bit. In my hurry I left behind a regimental paper. . . ."

"Please. . . ."

She rose, and obediently, as usual, fell back three paces, exactly as if the major had entered the barracks office, and she were the sergeant.

"Please. . . . Please. . . . There it is. Don't bother . . . please don't bother at all. . . . At what time dinner to-day?"

"As you arranged, at eight, punctually at eight," she stammered, not raising her eyes to his face, "or. . . ."

"Right, at eight. . . . I'll be free at eight . . . frantically busy, child. . . ."

"Child!" Melanie smiled. He always called her that when he was in a genial mood . . . she, his child. . . .

He resumed: "Might just run across to barracks after dinner. Frantically busy, I don't know why, everything has been lying ready for months. One can hardly understand. . . ."

"There will be a guest at dinner," she said.

"There always is, child . . . a guest . . . Adolf, of course. Adolf of the eighth, the musical genius. Never failed, good Adolf; why should he fail the last evening, child? By-by!"

He was gone. The document, which had been lying on the top of the desk, he popped into the sleeve of his coat, just as he stuck the whip into the leg of his boot when he went to the riding-school.

Thank goodness he did not trouble about her

and the past which she was clearing away; why should he, to-day, when at last had happened the thing which, as she knew, he had been expecting for years. What mattered now a child and her past, now, when hundreds of thousands were going out to war, to a bloody war, a war in which everything was at stake, as he had told her only yesterday?

Melanie was lost again in her letters . . . they were all written on the same plain grey paper, the colour of the card which Mrs. Hof brought a quarter of an hour ago, the colour Melanie loved because it reminded her of the simplicity of a character which she prized above all others. Above all others! Above all the brilliant cavaliers who pretended to adore her, the wonderful beauty of eighteen. At dances and picnics they courted her, at Berlin, and in far-away East Prussia, until they discovered that Falkenstein, the estate of her easy-going father, was mortgaged up to the hilt. Then, one after the other withdrew with cold and courteous compliments.

Surely Melanie von Berkersburg was acquainted with the bitterness of life, although she was only twenty-five, and might have at command riding-horses and motor-cars, dresses and jewels. She might live like a princess; but she knew the bitterness of life. "Who never ate his bread in tears . . ." How fully she felt the meaning of those words just then!

She continued to read. That was Adolf's first letter, written tenderly, his feelings becoming more clear as he gently tried to discover hers. This letter was written in December 1909, from Berlin, where he was visiting a chum who had been ordered to the Military School.

In this letter Adolf described a performance of "Tristan," this worshipper of Wagner. . . . And he, lieutenant of the infantry regiment in Gumbinnen, who, year after year, drilled his recruits, quoted Gottfried von Strassburg. . . . "And as now the maid and the man, Isôlt and Tristan," and so on, and so on. . . . Was it possible, the mediæval poem of Gottfried von Strassburg? How much leisure must a man have who is a lieutenant at Gumbrunnen, drills recruits, and is in love, when fate guides him from such a hole to the Royal Opera-house at Berlin?

Melanie suddenly remembers the day and hour that she received this letter at Falkenstein. It was just before Christmas, and she was playing the part of good fairy. Lehmstadt, the forester, had already cut down the Christmas-trees for the family and the servants, and, as at this time every year, it was her task to decorate them and to give presents to all and sundry . . . This letter found her in the hour of her purest and fullest happiness. . . . "The maid and the man, Isôlt and Tristan."

Sending to a bookseller in the nearest town, she at last found a translation of the mediæval German poem published by Reclam. And during the days preceding the festival of charity she read it, thinking of him all the time: the story of King Mark's Consort, who broke faith for love, the story of fair Isôlt and the Knight who together journeyed across the sea, who became one in oneness, after they first had been two and twofold . . . this wonderful story.

Melanie recalled those two, while hundreds of thousands were taking up arms in the provinces of Germany, leaving father, mother, wife, and

child, to pour forth from east to west like an irresistible river, a river whose fiery torrents, as they believed, none could withstand. In the midst of this warlike clamour, deep within her echoed the immortal poem of "Tristan and Isôlt. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

FLOWERETS WHICH DROOP THROUGH THE FROST OF THE NIGHT

“THE captain sends his respectful compliments, and I was to take these flowers to madam.”

Weiss, Adolf's orderly, stood in the drawing-room. He entered without Melanie's perceiving him, absorbed as she was in her memories of the past. There he stood, close to the door, in his smart military attitude. Startled, she gazed at him as if he were not the servant, but the master himself.

When she saw the roses it seemed to her that she would lose the last vestige of self-control.

“These roses are from the front garden of the captain's house, Weiss,” she said at last.

“Yes, madam; the captain himself had the roses planted there, a few years ago, and he tended them with his own hands.”

“I know, Weiss, and I know these roses. Is there any other message, my friend?”

Melanie did not know how this word “friend” came to issue from her lips. She only remembered vaguely that it was an expression used by her husband to his subordinates when he happened to be in a jovial mood—which seldom occurred.

“The captain said that he would soon come himself.”

"Very good, Weiss."

"Your servant, madam."

The orderly prepared to leave.

"Stop, Weiss, just take down that vase; you are taller than I am."

"The Meissen vase from the bookcase, madam?"

"Yes, that one. Thank you; I will have the roses put in water at once."

Melanie rang for Mrs. Hof, who was given the flowers and requested to put them in water. She took them, viewed them with unfavourable looks, and retired. Weiss again made to go.

"Stay a moment, Weiss."

"At your service, madam."

Melanie went to her husband's smoking-table, and took a few Havana cigars from a box.

"Here, take a handful of cigars for the field, Weiss."

"Thank you very much, madam."

"Weiss, in what mood is the captain? Did he say anything to you yesterday?"

"Nothing particular, madam. He just whistles softly all day long, and the night too; songs all the time; but the captain always liked to do that."

"And you, Weiss?"

"What do you mean, madam?"

"How do you feel about it? You are going to the front, and you may meet your death, my friend."

Again this word, which surprised her as soon as it was uttered. Melanie wished to say it in her husband's genial tone, but she never could say it as he did. Her conception of kindness was very different from his. Yet she used this word. Perhaps she thought of Weiss's master when she used it.

Weiss fumbled awkwardly with his cap. He was not quite sure what to answer to the lady's questions. . . .

"Well, Weiss, and what is in your mind on the eve of leaving for the front?"

"Oh, my God, madam, I am engaged to be married," said Weiss at last.

"All soldiers have a girl, Weiss; none of them bother very much about it at such a time." Melanie intentionally spoke with flippancy.

The young fellow blushed. "I beg your pardon, madam, but mine is a real engagement."

The boy's seriousness provoked a smile, but she resumed: "But, Weiss, not engaged to a girl whom you want to marry?"

"Sure and certain, madam. If the war had not come, I should have been free next September. My father has a small estate in Wolfach in the Black Forest, my parents have been expecting me ever so long; and Liesel is the daughter of a wealthy farmer. We got engaged during my last leave, last summer, and the estates adjoin, madam."

"Of course, if the estates adjoin!"

A smile hovered over Melanie's face. "Tout comme chez nous!" she thought. But she did not wish to torment the poor fellow any further, and continued:

"In a few months, you will be back home as a victor, Weiss; then you will court your Liesel, and the estates can be joined together."

"That is what I hope, madam, when we have smashed the French."

"And the Russians and English, Weiss; don't forget them, please."

"We'll smash them as well, madam!"

Melanie did not answer. The orderly considered

himself dismissed, and clicked his heels together, saying, "Good-bye, madam!"

"Good luck, my friend!"

At this moment Mrs. Hof returned with the roses. She overheard Melanie's last words, and looked at the orderly with unspeakable contempt. She was boundlessly jealous about her major, and "that person" she considered capable of anything.

Melanie suddenly felt an instinctive horror of the thoughts she could perceive in Mrs. Hof's mind—thoughts that touched and soiled the pure isolation where her soul was brooding.

"The major came to me in the kitchen just now, madam."

"And what did the major want with you in the kitchen, if I may ask, Mrs. Hof?"

"The major was pleased to alter the menu, madam."

"But we have a guest," exclaimed Melanie thoughtlessly.

"The major wants lamb instead of fowls."

"I see . . . but captain Adolf does not eat lamb. . . . Then prepare both, Mrs. Hof. Do you hear? Lamb and fowl; now please go away, I am busy."

"Very well, madam; both then, if only the major will not be put out about it. . . ."

"That is my business."

"Yes, I know, madam."

At last Mrs. Hof was gone. Melanie took up the vase with the roses and breathed in their perfume. These roses had a history for Adolf, and Adolf loved flowers dearly, and for her; he was a connoisseur of roses. When he decided to plant with roses the bare front garden of his bachelor's

house, Adolf had asked her to help him in his selection. Together they ordered the finest specimens from Schmidt in Erfurt. Many an evening when von Berkersburg was playing cards at the Casino, they sat together in the villa discussing the different varieties.

Melanie looked at the roses. There was the pink one, the *La France*, the rose she loved, not only for its splendid size and wonderful colour, but also for its name. . . . Adolf had chosen it in memory of Melanie's happy hours in Paris. There was the deep red *Lady Rothschild*, the pure white *Marquise de Pompadour*; there was the glowing sulphur-yellow *Maréchal Niel*, hanging its heavy head as if in sorrow. That was Adolf's favourite. Speaking of it to Melanie, he had quoted Heine's lines :

" What betoken yellow roses ?
Love that over anger burns,
Anger that to love returns,
Love in bitterness that closes."

The August sun had gone to rest behind the hills on the left bank of the Rhine ; a cool breeze began to blow across the water, and with the gathering darkness announced the coming night. The arc-lamps in the *Rheinallee* gleamed out. Melanie closed the balcony door and snapped the switch. A subdued light filled the room in which she waited—for him.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

HALF AN HOUR later Adolf came into the drawing-room where Melanie had passed the time in clearing away the old letters. On the eve of the great destruction they went the way of everything earthly. All of them—all : she did not venture to keep even the letter in which he first revealed the sweet secret of two dissevered hearts.

Melanie was sitting by the fireplace under the clock, which supported a statuette of Happiness. The flying gilded figure of the sprite, elusive as Time himself, seemed to mock her as she looked up at it. Here she read through once more, tore up and burned, letter after letter. Slowly and silently they dissolved in ashes—ashes grey like the dead hopes that were strewn on the fire in her heart.

She glanced at the little grey heap of ashes of her past, so significant in the midst of the surging present, lit by the torches of War. She sat down again to the piano, and again her fingers wandered, as if seeking something, over the keys. This time an old English folk-song : "Long, Long Ago" sounded once more in her drawing-room, once more at the dawn of a great upheaval, a song of old sympathy and friendship : "Long, Long Ago" . . .

Suddenly Melanie felt Adolf's presence. He was standing behind her, a man of thirty-six, in the fulness of his powers. How different he was from the man who had become her husband ! His thick curling fair hair was not yet touched with grey. How silky it was Melanie knew well. Once in the sacred hour of farewell and profoundest grief, she had stroked that hair consolingly. His violet-blue eyes, earnestly bent upon her—how different a language from the cold, light-blue eyes of the other, of whose searching stare she has always been secretly afraid.

The fingers of his slender hand, resting on the intense black ebony of the piano, looked as sensitive as a woman's. His eyes held hers, and seemed to repeat the words of the English song, "Long, Long Ago. . . ."

Adolf looked like an Englishman, although he was a Prussian officer. Smilingly Melanie reaffirmed that fact, so often asserted, reaffirmed it even on this day when everything English ought to be his mortal enemy according to divine and human law. She reasserted her opinion and smiled, for she remembered, Adolf told her so himself, that his mother was of English extraction, like the mother of the man who gave the order to mobilise.

Adolf's tall figure was bowing before her. He took her hand and lifted it reverently to his lips.

"Will you give me a few minutes for a chat, madam? A last chat before——"

"Before you go to the front, captain Adolf?"

He smiled. "Oh no, madam; before your husband arrives."

"But certainly."

"Let us sit down," said Adolf, pointing to the chairs by the Boule table.

Melanie sat down as if hypnotised by the gesture. There was a painful silence. From the clock on the mantelpiece rang out three clear silvery strokes . . . a quarter to eight.

In Adolf's voice there was a vibration of pain, a vibration like the tremor of a violin string strained so sharply that it breaks.

"There was music, harmony, Melanie . . . and yet . . . now . . . it is as if a string snapped suddenly within . . . here."

He laid his hand on his breast and gazed at her for a moment as if overpowered by grief. Her grey eyes fell before his sad, inquiring glance.

"Why must it come like this?" he asked.

Her voice full of tears, she murmured low: "You mean . . . at Falkenstein, when you were billeted upon us during the manoeuvres?"

"Ah, yes, on that autumn evening in the park near the swan-pond. Do you remember, Melanie? You asked me to meet you at sunset to tell me the truth. You have kept it from me until now; but I think I am entitled to know it to-day, the day that we part for ever, Melanie."

"That we part for ever?"

"Yes, I shall not come back."

"Adolf!"

"No, I shall not return, and that is why I want to know the truth, why I insist upon hearing it. That is why I came once more. Berkersburg is so extremely punctual, you said to yourself just now. We have scarcely ten minutes left, Melanie. That evening near the swan-pond, you repeated the song. . . ."

"Which song, Adolf?"

“ Heine’s :

“ ‘ It is so cool and gloomy,
All flowers vanished since long,
The stars have flamed to ashes,
The swan’s last lay is sung.’ ”

“ You repeated it, Melanie, and then . . . ”

“ And then. . . . ”

“ And then : ‘ All is over for ever. Don’t ask the reason why ; but all is over for ever.’ You said it sobbing, then you hurriedly left me and ran away through the park to the terrace, where the others were laughing and drinking. I could not follow you there. What was the reason that you would not reveal ? ”

“ Don’t ask, Adolf, don’t ! Even to-day you are torturing yourself and me. I am so deeply ashamed of myself. . . . ”

“ I am going to my death, Melanie. To-day I have a right to ask that question. ”

“ You cannot know, my friend, that you will be killed. Hundreds of thousands are going along the same road with you ; not all of them get killed. Hundreds of thousands come back to their homes, happy and victorious. ”

“ But not I ; neither happy nor victorious. I lost my happiness, I was conquered, Melanie, in the hour when you agreed to marry Berkersburg . . . and that is why I can never return victorious—never. Why did you do it, Melanie ? You owe it to me to tell me ; I must call you to account to-day, if ever, Melanie. You owe it to me, for I am going to my death. ”

She gazed at him unable to speak.

With infinite love his deep eyes rested on her face, pallid under the soft light. His dry lips nervously whistled a tune. Melanie knew it—

Wilhelm Hauff's "Horseman's Song." The words throbbed in her wearied brain :

"Morning red, morning red,
Light'st me to my earthly bed ?
Hark the bugle's note is calling !
Many a comrade round me falling,
Low with mine shall lay his head."

She pulled herself together. "I will tell you everything, Adolf."

"That is sweet and kind of you, Melanie. Can I part from the emerald Rhine and life without grief, Melanie ?"

"You may, my friend."

"Well ?"

"I was forced to act as I did."

"I do not understand."

"My father would have been ruined if I had refused to marry Berkersburg."

"Was that the only reason ?"

"The only reason."

"But, explain. . . ."

"His creditors were after him. I had been in my father's room before I asked you to meet me at the swan-pond. . . ."

"And . . . ?"

"And . . . there was a revolver on my father's desk. The bills had become due once more, and no one could meet them but Berkersburg. At such a price I could not"

"And that is the truth ?"

"That is the truth, God help me. I could not. The sacrifice would have been too great. I loved my father. Are you angry with me ?"

"I have never been angry with you, Melanie."

"Now you know all."

Adolf was shaken as with a convulsion. He

threw himself on his knees before Melanie and buried his face in her lap. Once again her trembling fingers caressed his fair hair. All remembrance of her position and her surroundings fell away from her. She was back again in her father's grounds on that autumn evening. And suddenly she raised his head in her two hands and pressed a long, passionate kiss on his lips.

They started asunder like two detected sinners. The clock on the mantelpiece struck eight—eight shrill, loud strokes. Berkersburg was at the door.

He looked at the two, but said not a word. Turning round, he called out :

“ Mrs. Hof ! ”

The old housekeeper's voice replied from the kitchen : “ Yes, sir ? ”

“ It is eight o'clock. Is dinner ready ? ”

“ All ready, sir.”

“ Ice the wine.”

“ Moselle ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; three bottles. I am dying with thirst.”

“ Very well, sir.”

With an imperious gesture Berkersburg pointed to the dining-room, and both took the hint as if it were a command.

CHAPTER VI

WEARY SOULS

ON the table, laid for the last time in the major's home, Melanie put the roses from Adolf's garden.

A grateful look from Adolf's dark eyes sought the lady of the house. Berkersburg saw it clearly; nothing escaped him. Nothing ever did escape him; not the scene in the drawing-room, which he was doomed to witness, thanks to his proverbial punctuality.

But he showed no sign. He carved the joint in his usual business-like manner, his snow-white serviette in the collar of his uniform coat. Melanie and Adolf thought him completely engrossed in his occupation. But every now and then he stealthily glanced at the others. Jealousy, not lessened by having been long and painfully suppressed, began to gnaw at his heart.

"And this was the last evening," he thought. The day of reckoning had arrived at last, not only between the nations of Europe.

He mused silently; his eyes glittered; something seemed to be choking him as he drained his glass in one draught.

"Drink, Adolf; drink, my dear friend," he urged, filling his guest's glass to the brim.

"Thank you, Berkersburg. Mind! The glass is overflowing."

"Like too many others," muttered the master of the house.

He lifted his newly-filled glass to drink with Adolf. The two glasses clinked sharply when they touched. It made Melanie think of the clashing of swords; swords now drawn by his Majesty's orders; swords that would not be sheathed again until the War of Destruction was over.

The War of Destruction! The thought made Melanie shiver. Again she recalled Paris—Paris in spring, French songs; the time when she was perfectly happy.

"Well, do you like it, Adolf?"

"Splendid, Berkersburg."

Now the rattle of knives and forks alone was to be heard. Berkersburg seemed to have a good appetite for his dinner in spite of everything. Melanie could hardly swallow a mouthful, and Adolf was obliged to put force upon himself to assume a natural demeanour and counterfeit good spirits.

Melanie's nerves were tense. Everything seemed to irritate her to-day. How her husband smacked his lips. He always did over lamb, notwithstanding his education, acquired with so much difficulty. It was still something external with him, like a new tie or a pair of gloves, to be changed or cast off at any moment. Education, she reflected, what did he understand by education? Something acquired, a varnish. Would it stick on during the days and weeks and months of trial?

They were all "educated"—all these people among whom she had grown up. She herself, Adolf, her father—who had decided, after having lost Falkenstein, to depart this life in decency, if she had not sold herself. Her husband, all these

gentlemen with whom she had been acquainted, all had education, but nothing else. Deportment, the ability to accept the inevitable in a correct manner : that was the ultimate end of all wisdom ; that was what was understood by this fine word—education. Only that !

And Melanie wanted nature. Well, she might search for it for a long time.

Her musings were broken in upon by her husband, who wished to fill her glass.

“ No, thank you ; I won’t drink anything.”

He smiled meaningly. “ You won’t drink anything ? Well, I am accustomed to that. Why won’t you drink anything ? Is it in order to annoy me ? ”

Melanie had no desire to invite his reproaches on this last evening in his home. She took away the hand with which she had covered her glass, and answered gently :

“ Oh, if you wish it, fill my glass by all means.”

“ Of course I wish it, dearest,” he returned. “ How could I not wish it, child ? We must drink together this last evening, you and Adolf and I, to our victory, about which I have no misgivings ; to our joyful home-coming, my dears, and to a further happy life together for the three of us. Good health and good luck to you, comrade.”

The three glasses were lifted. Melanie’s hand trembled when her glass touched that of her husband. She uttered a low cry : the glass had fallen from her fingers, it broke into fragments, and the golden wine flooded the white cloth.

“ Chips,” said Berkersburg calmly ; “ chips, after all.”

Adolf attempted to lighten the atmosphere by suggesting that the breaking of the glass signified

the smashing of the enemy ; but the attempt was not a success.

Mrs. Hof removed the plates, and put clean ones on the table.

"Is there another course coming?" asked Berkersburg.

"Fowls," answered Melanie.

Her husband smiled ironically. He remembered that fowls were Adolf's favourite dish, as lamb was his.

"You have seen to it, child, that neither of us is neglected. That was very nice of you," he remarked.

"Yes," said Melanie simply.

As Melanie carved the chickens, he turned to Adolf, and asked, apparently quite irrelevantly:

"You know, don't you, the ballad of the Castellan of Coucy?"

"Of course."

"You should ask my wife to give you the heart, my friend. Fowls have hearts, as well as pigeons and other creatures. But, after all, you don't want to be depressed at this time: well, if not, then don't."

Adolf did not reply. He tried to catch Melanie's eyes, unsuccessfully, for she bent her head before her husband's searching look, as if deeply ashamed. She was ashamed, not for her own sake, but for his.

The dinner dragged on under a constraint that was only too palpable to all.

When the apricots were served Berkersburg could not refrain from another innuendo. He compared the fruit with ripe apples, which they did not resemble in the least. He took one from the dish and offered it to Melanie.

"Thank you," she murmured. She had long

ceased to expect any graciousness on his part ; she felt that there was something underneath this act of courtesy.

" You are so well up in literature, Melanie," he said, with a meaning look.

" Only for home purposes," she replied, discreetly ; but she could not resist the temptation to add : " I am aware that I have lacked opportunities for cultivating literature in your house."

" So am I, Melanie, as a matter of fact. It only just occurred to me that the primal cause of the Trojan war was an apple in the hand of a beautiful woman. When I look at you I am reminded of the Greek legend."

" Thanks——"

Melanie rose and rang for coffee. She had not expected that the last supper with her friend would have been like this. As the fragrant coffee steamed in the cups, Berkersburg began again.

" Did you get everything ready, Melanie ? Surely there was a great deal to do ?"

" I, I am quite ready," she answered.

" Indeed——"

A long pause.

Adolf drank his coffee and sat smoking his cigar in reflective silence.

Suddenly Berkersburg inquired :

" Have you enjoyed your dinner with us ?"

" Rather," replied Adolf, although he had found it difficult to swallow one mouthful. " We shall probably not have a supper like this for a long time, though our field-kitchens cook quite well, as they proved in the manœuvres."

Berkersburg smiled deprecatingly.

A feeling of cruelty seemed to rise within him, and his eyes glittered as he remarked :

“ Oh well, we ought to find some good living in the French castles, with their cellars full of champagne.”

He sprang up, and, saying,

“ Excuse me ; I have to go back to the barracks,” he left the room.

It was impossible for Berkersburg to act differently.

From early youth he had suffered from an inability to utter what was in his mind. He had read widely and well ; but the opinions he formed never found words, and his inclination to think and muse and ponder had gradually made him self-centred, diffident in expressing what was uppermost in his heart and soul, even, sometimes, almost insincere.

In the early days of their acquaintance Adolf's entirely different temperament had strongly attracted Berkersburg, and the then young lieutenant had intuitively guessed Berkersburg's real nature ; he had caught glimpses of that nature, and knew that von Berkersburg was not really the martinet, the stern, exacting chief, whom all his subordinates feared. Thus the friendship between these two men, so utterly different, had gradually grown in depth and fervour during their years of daily intercourse.

Berkersburg's morbid dislike of showing his feelings, this habit of silently making up his mind, had hampered and frustrated him in all his relations with Melanie. He might, or might not, have won her if he had been able to bring himself to let her know how deep his affection was. But he simply could not ; he had come to the conclusion that he could have no attractions for her. Then her father's financial difficulties seemed to give

him his chance ; but as soon as he had completed the sordid bargain with von Falkenstein, he felt its ugliness, and was convinced that Melanie could only despise him for having bought her.

And these conflicting sentiments—his friendship for Adolf, his love for Melanie, his conviction that he had abused his financial standing, and his firm belief that she accused him of having ruined her life by this marriage, threw him into such mental turmoil that he was less able than ever to say what any other man in his position would have said : he continued to maintain a silence of despair.

CHAPTER VII

GRIEVOUS PAIN DRIPS DOWN

THE full moon shone over the Rhine, building bridges of silver from Mayence to Biebrich. The murmuring waves of the river were singing a melody which Melanie seemed often to have heard before. She heard it again when she went out on the balcony by Adolf's side. But it was very different from the refrain now in the air, that was haunting all Germany from the Rhine to the Memel, from the Adige to the Belt.

Melanie von Berkersburg heard a different song. She was now indifferent to what she had always shunned. It no longer agitated her that Berkersburg should leave her and Adolf together, alone. On the contrary, it gave her happiness: she no longer felt apprehension, on his account or on hers. With the new hour came a readjustment: the eternal values asserted themselves. So felt Melanie, as, taking her lover's hand, she gazed into the blossoming garden and on the great river beyond, steeped in floods of silvery light.

From the further shore floated the old song. She pressed Adolf's hand. No, she had no fear in this hour, even if Berkersburg were to surprise her now as he had surprised her in the drawing-room. Why should she feel fear at such a time

when thousands were about to die, whose names even would be forgotten in a few hours?

To die . . . to die . . . what does the little word mean after all, the word that once had filled her soul with anguish? It was beginning to lose its significance; she saw lists of hundreds and thousands of names unknown and uninteresting to her; she saw the newspapers with their long death-roll; saw wide fields stretching before her. She closed her eyes to realise the fleeting joy of the pressure of Adolf's hand-clasp. But still she saw the fields sown with crosses; cross adjoining cross, grave touching grave, and each of these thousand graves held a man's fate, full of joy and of sorrow, full of love and of hatred, full of friendship and full of hope. The graves of these thousands whom lips would never name again . . . were they only always graves?

Melanie shuddered.

"What is the matter?" asked the man by her side.

"Nothing, nothing, dear; I am thinking—oh, I believe at last I shall have to think of these terrors all alone, while the world has gone mad."

"Why alone? What terrors do you fear?"

"I felt sometimes like that, dear, in the horrible hours that lie behind me. I shall feel it in the more horrible hours to come, through which I shall have to live."

"But what is it you feel, Melanie?"

"That I have something of Cassandra in me."

"What do you mean?"

"That I must fulfil my irrevocable doom, knowing, seeing," she said in a low voice.

"I do not understand."

"And yet you are an artist."

"Unhappily, I am not."

"But you desired to be one."

"Certainly."

"And if you desired that you have imagination, you must have imagination."

"Yes, I ought to have it."

"I am thinking of all those thousands who will have lost the last remnant of their imagination. Can you not understand?"

"What, Melanie? Really I am afraid you are ill."

"I am afraid I am, or may be so with some, with only the slightest imagination. Don't you see it at all?"

"But what?"

"Behind the mountains, dear, that separates us from France, terrible France."

"What do you mean?"

"The immense tomb into which they will bury it all, all the misery brought about to no purpose at all. Oh, it is too abominable."

"But, do calm yourself."

"I will try; see, I am calm again. It is you, all of you, who are marching forth, flowers in your hands, on the soft, flowery carpet of our beautiful earth, as if you were going to a wedding feast."

Adolf looked tenderly into her eyes.

"And is it not so, dear? To me at least it seems like that since you told me; since you gave me to know the truth, since my head rested on your knees."

"Is it so, indeed?"

"Yes, and it is really true after all."

"What is true after all?"

"That this great hour creates new values."

Your husband, who has been a burden on my soul for all these years, fell away from me in this hour. My chains are loosened. I do not feel them any longer, since you have told me that he bought you, and that you could never be his own. For what one buys one does not really possess. Only one thing can be possessed."

"What is that?"

"The thing one has to fight and struggle for, like the victory which we all hope to attain."

"Yes, dear, the victory, the victory."

She looked at him with shining eyes.

"How happy it makes me, that word 'victory'; that you should have spoken that word without my having to say it: victory, victory!"

Melanie let go his hand and stood on the balcony in the flood of moonlight, stretching both arms towards the Rhine.

"Do you know what I see now in my mind's eye?"

"What is it, Melanie?"

"I see the entry of the victors; I see no longer the graves. I see them riding snow-white horses, laurels in their hands; laurels soaked in blood, and yet how beautiful."

She seemed entranced, and Adolf was almost afraid for her. Never in his life had he seen her so rapt. Even music had never thrilled her like this. To bring her back to herself he said gently:

"A cool wind is blowing from the river, dear. Shall we not go into the room? You are chilled."

"I do not feel it, but, if you prefer, we will go back into the room."

As if she really were a child, as her husband called her, Adolf took her by the hand, and like

a child she followed him submissively into the room.

In the light of the drawing-room, hard and brilliant in contrast with the shadow and silver outside, Melanie looked at him like one out of her mind. Anxiously he gazed at her. She hurried to her desk, took something from the drawer where she had kept the letters, and held it out to him. At first in his confusion he did not take it, and did not realise what it was.

"Won't you accept it?" she stammered. "Please do; I had it taken for you at the time, but then I could not allow myself to give it you. It was meant for you."

Adolf saw that it was Melanie's portrait. He had always longed to have a portrait of her, and had asked for one in his letters. Yes, she used to look just like that in the old days, before her girlish features were shadowed with disappointment and sadness. So he had seen her in Berlin and after in the autumn-flushed woods of Falkenstein. How like her it was! He touched the portrait with his lips, and reverently put it away in his vest-pocket.

"To-day I may, to-day I must give it you, dear; notwithstanding everything. It might become a mascot, bringing you back victorious. It might shield you . . . don't you think so? . . . it might shield you."

Sobbing, and unable to command herself any longer, Melanie threw herself into his arms and hid her face on his breast.

"A shield, a shield," she repeated. "To-day, when the measuring-rods are broken, when all are weighed anew and found wanting, to-day, to-day. . . ."

Deeply moved, Adolf murmured with conviction :

" Yes, dear, it might become that ! "

From the neighbouring barracks a trumpet-call rang sharply out, cutting across Melanie's exalted mood like the blade of a sword.

" What is it ? " she cried.

" Reveille," he replied in a serious tone.

" Reveille at eleven at night ? "

" The men slept a couple of hours in the day-time ; they are awakened now. They need the night for getting ready."

" Now they awaken them for the last time . . . awaken them." She repeats his words.

" Reveille . . . it warns me too. . . . Reveille for the last morning . . . the train starts at half-past five."

Just as Adolf was about to take her once more in his arms, Mrs. Hof slipped into the room.

" What do you want, Mrs. Hof ? " asked Melanie with irritation.

" Madam must excuse if I disturb her, but the major ordered the house to be locked up at eleven, and the captain has no key to let himself out, so far as I know."

Melanie's face flushed crimson at the impertinent tone.

" What insolence ! " she thought, and sickened afresh at Mrs. Hof's smug smile.

But what could it matter now ? To-morrow they would all be dispersed to the four winds ; this woman, herself, her lover, and her husband.

" Thank you very much, Mrs. Hof," said Adolf with icy courtesy. " It would indeed have been painful if the house had been closed and I had been obliged to inconvenience you."

"The major ordered me to close the house punctually at eleven," deprecated Mrs. Hof.

Adolf took no further notice of her. Turning to Melanie, with an irreproachable bow, and clicking his heels together,

"Good-bye," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

SO LONG A TRAIN OF PEOPLE

BUNTING waved at every window, the bells of the cathedral and the churches pealed out their clanging voices, as if victory had already been won; it was but the departure for the front.

Melanie felt dazed. No sleep had come to her all night through. She could only toss from side to side, waiting and waiting for the morning, the morning whose coming she dreaded and which yet seemed as if it would never come. The terrible morning! And here it was at last.

It was long since she had shared her husband's bedroom. That had not happened since the first year of their marriage, not since Berkersburg realised that he had failed in winning her love. She could scarcely remember that he had ever touched her. She believed that she was merely a whim in his life, she thought nothing more: an amusement which he could afford, and of which he soon tired; the fancy of a man who could afford to pay for his fancies. And he withdrew silently, unable to make her understand that she was mistaken, unable to draw away the veil that concealed his real feelings.

At last the day broke. The sun rose from the water as if from a lake of blood, pouring its searching rays into Melanie's chamber till she seemed

to stand, blinded and confused, on the threshold of a new world. The hour of farewell had struck for her also, this day would see her departure, first for Berlin, then for Falkenstein. She stood shivering in her nightdress near the open window, looking at the marvellous eastern sky, at the phantasmagoria of clouds, burning like a conflagration in the ensanguined light.

Berkersburg was gone. His farewell was as curt and unemotional as usual; just the same as it was every day when he mounted his favourite black horse to ride to the barracks.

"Keep well, child, take care of yourself"; that was all he said at their parting. Melanie felt as if she were on the edge of an abyss, as if a world were being engulfed at her feet. Yet she could hear, softly beating, the wings of a golden hope that was soaring out of the depths.

However much she tried to concentrate her mind on Adolf this morning, on him alone, Melanie's thoughts kept coming back to her husband. She could see nothing but the picture of him that had stamped itself on her mind, when for the first and only time she saw him riding to the parade-ground at the head of his battalion. Melanie could never forget it. He rode Sendomir, his favourite. He had drawn his sword, and she thought his cold blue eye was fixed on the distant horizon as if threatening it, the grey distance full of quivering mists and the tears of the sky.

She would see him again like that to-day on the back of Sendomir, rigid, as if cast together with his charger, rider and horse grown together into a single bronze figure. The hour of departure drew near. His regiment, also Adolph's, was to march to the railway station, along the Rheinallee.

Melanie shivered in the cool morning wind blowing from the Rhine. Oppressed by her heavy weight of sorrow, hardly able to draw breath, she had left her window open all night to catch the air, and did not close it now. She wrapped round her slender body the heavy damask curtain, which draped her like the purple toga of a Cæsar.

The sound of drums and pipes swelled up on the wind . . . The regiment ! . . . The regiment ! . . .

Melanie could see the servants of the neighbouring villa begin to crane their heads out of the window. Flowers fluttered from their hands into the street. The black, white and red flag on the roof of the villa flapped, bellied out, as if it would tear itself to pieces with joy : the regiment was coming !

The deep voices of the cathedral bells sounded out more resonantly, more warningly. Was it a victory, asked Melanie, that they were celebrating ? Or was it the setting out towards an unknown destiny ? Melanie's thoughts seemed to whirl round in her brain like leaves in the keen wind ; she seemed to be living at once in the past and in the future ; she could see only the picture of her husband, sword in hand on coal-black Sendomir.

Nearer and nearer swelled the roll of the drums and the shrill call of the pipes. The regiment was close at hand. A clamour of voices arose ; Melanie drew to the window, tried to see into the street. It was black with people, the whole town was aroused and had turned out, for the word had gone round that this was the hour at which the regiments ordered across the frontier were to leave. Children and grey-beards, girls and matrons—the street was packed with them. Melanie looked

down upon a turbulent sea of human bodies : a sea, the heaving billows of which, irresistible as the Rhine in spring when the great river bursts its barriers of ice, surged and trembled under the stress of this terrible hour. From overhead beat down the clangorous alarum of the cathedral ; from the human torrent below roared up the thousand-voiced song.

The strident clamour of men, the shrill tones of women, the tremulous accents of age, the ringing notes of boys, mingled in the refrain that broke upon Melanie's ear :

" Germany before all other,
Germany for evermore,
Her staunch sons, united fighters,
Brothers faithful to the core."

The regiment came in sight, stepping smartly and crisply as if on parade. As it reached the house a bugle-call rang out, the chorus of voices died away, and the band of the regiment began to play a stirring march. It was the greeting to Melanie of colonel von Trautmann, who in the peaceful days that seemed now so far off had paid her many attentions. Drawing the purple curtain more closely around her, she leant out of the window and waved her hand.

The colonel recognised her and lowered his sword in salute. She smiled in response, smiled as if they were meeting at a dance, as if this were not to end in a dance of death.

The colonel was riding his sorrel, whom Melanie had always envied him. The graceful creature, the most beautiful horse in the town, pranced daintily as if it were moving in a measure.

The thought came to Melanie that all these men appeared as if they were going to a dance. Their

rifles decked with blossoms, their helmets twined with oak leaves, roses in their hands, they seemed prepared for some festival. And all the town shouted for joy as if the festival had begun. She alone could not take part in the universal jubilation. As she waved her hand once more the old salutation, "Ave, Cæsar, Imperator, morituri te salutant," rose to her lips. . . . "Ave, Cæsar, Imperator, Ave, Ave !"

The street reverberated to the ceaselessly marching feet. Company after company, battalion after battalion, inexhaustible strength, an invincible, irresistible tide of men. Melanie's heart swelled with pride at the thought of this overwhelming might.

The terrible salute, "Ave Cæsar," the salute of those about to die, ceased to echo in her mind. She flew to the table where Adolf's flowers had stood during the night, and took from the bunch a blood-red rose. Eagerly she awaited the moment when Adolf should come in sight, on his white Arab. How often had she seen him on Rustan, looking, she used to think, like Siegfried or Lohengrin. Her expectant eyes searched vainly the moving columns.

She looked for black Sendomir and his rider. If her husband appeared, Adolf must soon follow, for the eighth company belonged to Berkersburg's battalion. She leant against the window-frame and clutched the folds of the curtain ; fearing to break down when the moment came that she should actually behold those two setting forward, side by side, for France. Here came her husband, the incarnation, it seemed to her, of destruction. He passed. Then, to her excited fancy, like one of the legendary angels going forth to war, radiant

in the morning sunshine, she saw her lover on his snow-white charger. Suddenly the column halted in front of the house ; Adolf looked up at her ; he saluted with his sword. Melanie threw the crimson rose, which fell at the feet of the horse and caused it to rear wildly.

Firmly controlling the startled animal, Adolf picked up the flower with the point of his sword and held it up like a blood-dyed trophy.

“ March ! ”

The command struck upon Melanie's ears like an echo of doom. The march was resumed, the standards disappeared in the distance, the tramp of feet died away.

Melanie was alone.

CHAPTER IX

MAKE YOUR WAY OVER THIS BANK

THE journey from the Rhine to Berlin was interminable. Passenger traffic was ignored to allow the military transport to be hurried across the Empire, rushed through Luxemburg and Belgium, and thrown into France, to tear from her Paris—her living, palpitating heart. After twenty-four hours of travel Melanie had only reached Erfurt. As the train dragged through the long day and night she saw on every hand an activity, a concentration of purpose that made her wonder more than ever at the colossal strength of the nation. "Germany is invincible," her husband had said. So it must be, Melanie thought.

Before the convincing sight of these masses, incessantly cast forth by the endless trains from every province, Melanie forgot the swarming industrial districts of Belgium, forgot the immortal fields of France, towering into heroic strength and ardour, forgot the resources of Britain, spurring forth her sons from India, Canada, Australia, Africa; forgot the steppes of Russia the illimitable, throwing out her arms to the Pacific; forgot the small, agile yellow men who had sailed round the Sunda Islands in fishing boats long before Occidental culture, not to say a German Empire, had

dawned on the thoughts of men. At this moment, she, too, believed this Empire to be invincible.

At every halting-place of the long journey the same scenes repeated themselves. Soldiers and yet more soldiers, as if in one single night Germany had been transformed into a huge military camp. In spite of the parting that wrenched her soul, Melanie's flagging courage mounted with the sun. Factories, mines, teeming cities, green country-sides dotted with their rural hamlets, had spawned forth armed men like the field of Cadmus. From the merchant's desk, from the teacher's chair, from bureau and warehouse, from college and conservatoire, from palace and from hovel, the resistless stream poured over the face of the land. And these, too, started to meet death flower-bedecked and with shouts of joy. As the trains rolled out of the stations there sounded forth :

“ Like gath'ring thunder spreads a cry,
Like clash of arms, when battle's nigh,
The Rhine, there's danger to the Rhine !
Who'd shield it from the foe's design ? ”

As Melanie passed Erfurt another day broke. Overpowered by weariness, she fell asleep and did not wake when the compartment was invaded by two young subalterns, who, having just obtained their commissions, were hastening to Berlin.

The faces of the youths glowed with joy and their eyes burned with the light of an almost wild fanaticism. How they laughed and talked and pledged one another in the claret with which the mother of one of them had provided him—the stirrup-cup of the departure for eternity. One was fair, the other dark. Neither had reached twenty : neither had yet tasted one drop of the bitterness of life. Sons of wealthy parents, they

had known nothing but enjoyment up to this hour. Their Emperor's command summoned them to face the grim front of death. Now they were hurrying towards it as carelessly as to a feast.

"Dear Fatherland, no fear be thine,
Steadfast and true, we guard our German Rhine!"

"I shall get mine," said one.

"Get what?" asked the other.

"The cross, of course."

"They won't believe their eyes at home, when you return with the cross."

Happily smiled he who intended to bring back the Iron Cross. He could see himself returning, the centre of every eye, the admiration of all the aproned and be-braided beauties of his birthplace, as if there were no graves in fair France, no field artillery, mowing down Germany's youth like ripe wheat.

"Life is never aught but error,
And in death alone we know."

When Melanie awoke, the sun was pouring down in the sandy plains of the Mark. The mountains of Thuringia were lost in the distance, and the monotonous pine-forests were stringing out beside the train as with increasing speed it neared terrible Berlin. Terrible: Melanie could find no other word for the city which she had always feared. Yet it allured her now more than ever; for now it was the centre of the great maelstrom that was whirling her, with how many more, into its depths.

As she looked out of the window for the first glimpse of the great city, Schiller's words came to her mind:

"And it bubbles and seethes, and it hisses and roars,
As when fire is with water commixed and contending."

The volcano from whence issued the eruption of this frightful war, the brain of this world-movement, seemed Berlin to Melanie at this hour. The stations flew past : Zahna, Jueterbogk, Teltow, Gross-Lichterfelde, Papestrasse . . . the speed slackened : Anhalt Station. Melanie got out and descended the steps of the great stair-way as in a dream. The station looked like a camp : soldiers, more and more soldiers, waiting for the trains to take them to the frontier ; and amidst the soldiers, wives, mothers, brides, sisters, fathers and brothers, waving handkerchiefs, shouting and singing, all possessed by the frenzy of invincible greatness and power.

“ Germany before all other,
Germany for evermore,
Her staunch sons, united fighters,
Brothers faithful to the core.”

Melanie passed into the Koeniggraetzerstrasse. Here too was a seething crowd, gathered to see the departure of the first regiment of the Guards. Their colours, torn by the war of 1870, waved proudly in the soft wind.

Faces in all windows, faces on the roof, stared and strained. Has the inconceivable thing become a fact ? Suddenly over the roll of the heavy drums and the call of the bugles rose the shouts of the crowd ; hats and handkerchiefs were waved. The crowd parted.

An open motor-car across the square. . . .

The Emperor !

Melanie's eye sought his face. It was ashen, rigid, inscrutable as iron, awful . . . like fate.

The car flew past, turned through the Koeniggraetzerstrasse, and vanished like an arrow from the hand of Death.

Melanie struggled through the crowd. She would walk to the Friedrichstrasse Station, to start from there upon the long journey to the Russian frontier.

The fresh air would do her good, and she could take a cup of coffee Unter den Linden at Basser's, where she used to sit so often in the old days.

"A rainstorm comes from rocks and mountains,
Pours down with thunder's fearful force,"

she murmured as she walked.

CHAPTER X

WITLESS SOULS

AT Wirballen Station the Falkenstein carriage awaited her. In days like these none could tell at what time any train might reach its destination, and the carriage had been waiting for three hours.

Christian, the baron's old coachman, who had carried Melanie in his arms when she was only a baby, was in the inn. He had at last unharnessed the horses and put them up. He could not have his cattle standing about in the sun for hours, and there was not the slightest shadow near or far.

At the inn gin flowed plentifully all the year round, for the baron was a distiller. They were all distillers in this district. For the rest, they growled in the Imperial Diet and voted against war taxes. They were the supporters of the Conservative party and of the Crown. About Wirballen and Koenigsberg, Danzig and Thorn, Stettin and Stargard, up to Poland, they were all distillers, and, as they needed a market, the gin flowed in streams.

Christian beat on the table with his horny hand, and the innkeeper brought another glass.

The peasants who were talking politics looked up.

The old Baron of Falkenstein was held in high regard ; was not the millionaire, major von Berkers-

burg, his son-in-law ? And Christian, his coachman, was a person to be respected.

In the corner near the stove was ensconced an aged man, toothless and tottering. He also helped to provide an income for the owner of Falkenstein. He was nearly eighty, and as a child he had heard from his father old stories of 1812, the year of the disastrous Retreat from Moscow. Now he had once more become an interesting personage. All the habitués of the inn hung upon his lips, even the distinguished Christian.

“As for Russia, my boys, that is a very complicated business.”

“Don’t keep using foreign words, Peter,” objected Christian.

He lolled complacently in his seat, smoking a big cigar, and added—

“Remember, Peter, the others don’t understand foreign words.”

“My father expressed himself in that way, Mr. Christian, and my father ought to know, for he was present at the time, and he always said that Russia was a complicated business. He saw the poor devils—they were Bavarians and Prussians—whom Napoleon in 1812 dragged with him into Russia, and they crawled into the fire, and were burned alive. Burned alive, I tell you ; my father said so. They were so cold, that they never knew that it was a fire.”

“You don’t say so, Peter ? ”

“That is what happened ; gospel truth. A very complicated business, my father always said. For you must know that Russia is a hundred times the size of Prussia ; that is, European Russia alone. Asiatic Russia has never yet been measured by any man. And when December comes the whole of

Russia is only ice and snow—and there are wolves there, whole herds of wolves. In 1812 they ate the camp-followers and the wounded who had not been killed by the Cossacks, they ate them flesh and bones : and therefore I say again, with my father, that as to Russia it is a very complicated business.”

Christian scratched his head.

“ Now look here, Peter. It is true that I have not had a father who went through the year ’12, but nowadays I think the matter is a little different.”

“ You may depend on my father,” insisted Peter. “ He always said, ‘ My boy, Russia is a complicated business.’ It is quite different from what the gentlemen at the green table in Berlin think it is. You may take it from me, for my father lived in the year ’12.”

“ Now will you allow me to finish ? ” asked Christian irritably.

Peter was silent and looked at Christian expectantly.

“ In the first place, this is not 1812 ; it is 1914. That is to say, we have very different means from what Napoleon had.”

“ That may be,” admitted Peter.

All the peasants round the table stretched out their necks, and the innkeeper in his cloth cap came out from behind the bar to hear the great man’s opinion.

“ Besides,” went on Christian, “ it is summer now, not winter. That’s where the difference comes in.”

“ But winter comes on early in Russia,” contended Peter.

Christian burst out laughing.

“ Where do you think, Peter, our boys will be

when winter comes ? What do you think my baron said our boys from Gumbinnen and Allenstein would be doing in the winter ? ”

“ Well, and where will they be ? ” Peter inquired.

“ In St. Petersburg, old chap, skating on the Neva, and the gentlemen of the Staff in the Winter Palace, dictating the conditions of peace. My baron said so last night, and my baron knows it is quite correct, for he has a friend in the War Office in Berlin, where they have the complete plan for the conquest of Russia all ready.”

The peasants were listening, eyes and mouth wide open.

“ Your baron has got a friend at the War Office ? ” they cried, staring at Christian as if he were an apparition from higher regions.

Christian, flattered, said it again :

“ My baron a friend at the War Office ? He has two there, I tell you. And it will go exactly like 1870, Woerth, Saint Privat, Gravelotte, Sedan, all in a jiffy ! That is what my baron says, and he knows ; he was there in '70 quite as much as your father was there in 1812.”

But Peter stuck to his point of view :

“ It's a complicated business about Russia, Christian ; you can't make it different.”

Christian was annoyed with such an obstinate opponent. But then, he was nearly eighty, and after all he was getting a bit dotty. If Christian had not thought that he would have talked quite differently to the old man ; but, as it was, he deprecatingly shrugged his shoulder at the complicated business of Russia, and delivered his judgment with an air of finality :

“ In the first place, we have the Austrian army,

my dear man. They will resist the first attack, and secondly, we have the best railways, and we have got Zeppelins."

"Those things that are said to fly in the sky?" asked old Peter with an incredulous smile, as if some one were trying to pull his leg.

Christian's irritation rose to fury. He banged his fist on the table till the glasses clattered again.

"Yes, the things that fly through the sky, and they do fly too, Peter. Why, with Zeppelins, you could carry a whole army to London across the sea."

"You don't say so, Christian!"

"Certainly, a whole army. But they will want a good many Zeppelins for it," he added somewhat uncertainly.

Peter was overwhelmed.

"If that is a fact, one might fly across the snowfields and the frozen Neva to St. Petersburg!"

"But of course we can, Peter."

Christian threw out his chest, as he proudly emphasised the "we," and wound up:

"Well, it is a different matter in 1914 from what it was in 1812."

"I think the train has been signalled from the last station, Mr. Christian," interposed the inn-keeper.

Christian got up and went to the stable to fetch the horses, which, although almost all the horses in the district had been commandeered for military purposes, von Falkenstein had been allowed to keep. He had scarcely finished harnessing them when the train arrived. Hat in hand, Christian waited on the platform for "Miss Melanie" as she still was to him. At last she

appeared, a bunch of withered roses in her hand. To his inquiry about the luggage :

“ It will all be forwarded by carrier, Christian,” she replied. “ We will start at once, and drive quickly, please ; for the long journey has tired me very much.”

“ The baron will be very glad to see madam.”

“ How is he, Christian ? ”

“ Always the same, madam, with his rheumatism always the same. In the summer, during the fine weather, it is better ; but the last week, when we had rain, it was very bad. Wuerz can tell you a tale about that, madam.”

Christian clicked his tongue, and the horses trotted off.

Melanie thought of Falkenstein and of the future, which, at any rate for the moment, was awaiting her ; her moody father, with his eternal agues, and his old servant Wuerz, who nursed him like a mother. . . .

But she was too tired even to think. The scenes her imagination had conjured up faded away ; she let herself sink back on the cushions of the carriage, and unresistingly gave herself up to the course of events, a few weeks ago so undreamed of, which was taking her back to her father and her old home.

CHAPTER XI

LEAVE ALL FAINT-HEARTEDNESS

AT the foot of the stairs leading from the courtyard to the house Melanie was greeted by the baron, his gouty limbs supported by a stick, his swollen feet encased in enormous felt slippers. He seemed to have aged rapidly since she saw him last.

Feeling like a stranger, she entered the well-known house. Could it be only two months since she had crossed its threshold? It seemed to her that years must have elapsed since she was there watching the return of the swallows, and gathering the yellow daisies that had begun to bloom in the meadows. Two short months; but the terrible events they had brought separated, as by a chasm, the accustomed past from the uncertain present, and the ominous future.

"Did you have a pleasant journey, my child?" asked the old baron's tired voice.

And Melanie answered, as she must answer something:

"So far, father, as one can speak of a pleasant journey in these horrible days."

They had mounted the stairs to the first floor, and were in the comfortable room, decorated with his hunting trophies, where the old man passed

the greater part of his days by the fire. It was years since he had been able to go out.

Mina, the parlour-maid, now appeared.

"May I take madam to her room?"

"Yes, Mina. I'll be back in half an hour father, and then we can talk."

"All right, my child; we'll talk then."

He dropped into his old grandfather's chair, and took his long pipe from the mantelpiece, as Melanie left the room with the maid. As soon as they were on the stairs, Mina ingenuously inquired:

"Did not madam find it very difficult to say farewell?"

"Why should it be difficult?" was on the tip of Melanie's tongue; but she could hardly admit all that the question would imply, and the girl ran on with her prattle, hardly giving Melanie time to answer. It seemed to her that these fateful hours were removing the barriers between master and man, mistress and maid, which in East Prussia, above all places, were so rigidly maintained.

She had cried dreadfully, the girl told her, for her Philip had to go. He was called up to join the artillery in Koenigsberg, and the Russians would surely invade the country, whimpered Mina.

"What does it matter?" thought Melanie, but she dared not say it aloud. She must try to reassure the girl. The Russians would not come, that was utterly impossible; the Emperor's Guards would make certain of that. But while reiterating these comforting assertions to the apprehensive maid, Melanie smiled ironically to herself: she did not believe her own words. She, Melanie von Berkersburg, did not believe in the invincibility of

the Army and the impotence of the Russians. During her marriage she had gained too deep an insight into the German character; she knew well the reverse of the medal; obstinacy and swagger, bluster and shallowness. "Empty shells," she used to say of them to herself as she talked to the men whom she met at dances and dinners—of all but one, and he in reality was not an officer at all, but a mere artist by the grace of God!

But—never mind!

Mina chattered on, and Melanie considered it her duty to console her. Philip was perfectly safe at Koenigsberg, she told her. Koenigsberg was impregnable; and the Russians would never cross the frontier. So she talked, and Mina became quite happy; for if the wife of the major did not know the truth about military matters, who did?

Melanie looked round her old room. Everything in it remained just the same as it was when she was married; even as it was before that, in her dead mother's time. In fact, East Prussia is a place where everything always remains the same, year in and year out. The old picture was still hanging over her bed, an antique engraving which she always used to look at full of pity: it represented Louise of Prussia flying to Memel from the Emperor Napoleon. Merely an episode of East Prussian history, nothing else.

While Mina dressed her hair, Melanie continued to talk kindly to the girl, inquiring how she came to make the acquaintance of her Philip. Mina's tale brought back her own youth, passed, free of care and cumber, in the country at Falkenstein, before von Berkersburg came on the scene. According to Mina, it was one Sunday afternoon in summer, at a dance at the inn, to which the young

men and girls had come long distances from the neighbouring estates and farms. Here it was that Mina had met Philip and that the romance had begun which was now so roughly interrupted by Philip's departure to take the field against the Russians.

Melanie was profoundly moved by the artless story. She felt that all women, poor and rich, high and low, were drawn together and made one in spirit by the anxiety and anguish of these days. She also was trembling for her loved one. And suddenly it seemed to Melanie as if the chains forged by years snapped asunder. She felt free again, unmarried and unfettered; as if here, amid the fields and woods which first gave birth to her relations with Adolf, she belonged again, heart and soul, to her friend.

A deep and secure happiness filled her at the thought. Here, so near the Russian frontier, which the enemy—she did not doubt it for a moment—would cross within a few days, she felt safe at last: safe from the husband who had never understood her, and whom she had not cared to understand. On the brink, perhaps, of catastrophe, she was finding peace. Why? From whence came the stillness that fell on her perturbed mind, refreshing it as the cool mist that floated in from the open window refreshed her feverish brow? Was this grim conflict, like the cutting north wind, dissipating with its harsh breath the vapours of conventional conceptions, and revealing the Alpine peaks of truth?

In the light of the great conflagration of war the shadows shifted. Right and wrong took on a different aspect. With the laws of nations and peoples cast into the crucible, what laws remained

for the individual? What new and unknown decrees were being written on the wall? The whole force of Melanie's soul was centred upon the deepest instinct of her being. Now she might, without self-reproach, feel herself free to think of him of whose bodily presence she might indeed be bereft for ever, but to whose soul her own had always sacredly belonged. That was the true, the only real bond.

Never again, Melanie resolved, would she walk under the corroding weight of chains of falsehood; riveted by external sanctions, dragging the soul down to the dust.

She could see her lover, the past put behind him, riding to the great contest; her blood-red rose lifted on his sword-point beaoning him on like a planet of war. So would she too go forward, her burning ideal before her. She would be free—free to own the truth to her own spirit: free to live the truth in the sight of others.

As Melanie lifted her eyes to the sky, her soul seemed to rise and float in an atmosphere of sincerity and candour, free as the bird which was winging its way before her to the heights of the illimitable blue.

CHAPTER XII

THE GULF OF CUSTOM A LONGER STAIRWAY

MELANIE went down to the hall. Here, too, all seemed unchanged, and Mohr, the old black cat, ran to meet her as usual. She fancied that his coat was rougher and less glossy than it used to be. Cats lose so much of their looks, when old age arrives and they become lazy and inert. She stroked the cat absent-mindedly, as it purred and stretched itself on the seat near the fireplace. She would not recall what had taken place since she was last here stroking that thick fur in just the same way.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Miss Tanner, the manageress of the estate. Miss Tanner, cheerful and genial, slim and active in spite of her sixty years, was the exact opposite of the terrible Mrs. Hof. She still ran about as alert as a weasel, all day long, brisk and indefatigable. Without her, Heaven knows what the gouty baron would have done. She saw to everything and had managed the whole estate even when Melanie was still at home.

For, as Melanie admitted to herself, the daughter of the house had never been of much use in it. She had always been treated as a spoiled child who was never to be asked to assume any responsibility.

Miss Tanner, always smiling, the personification of good spirits, even in these difficult days, seemed to bring a sunbeam into the darkest corner of the ancient house. It was for this reason that she was so invaluable to the old grumbling baron from whom Melanie had inherited her strain of morbidity.

"I hope you had a comfortable journey, madam?"

Miss Tanner put the conventional question in a tone that robbed it of all indifference. There was something solicitous, warm, motherly in it, that stirred Melanie's heart. The old maid, who had never loved and had never been a mother, made Melanie feel safe with her by this simple question, which from any one else would have sounded merely like the stereotyped introduction to a conversation.

With a grateful smile Melanie replied :

"My dear Miss Tanner, in these days travelling is a remarkable experience. I never before had a journey like this."

"No doubt it was a slow one, madam, as all available trains are wanted for military transport."

"It was indeed. It took me twenty-four hours to get from Cologne to Berlin, a distance one usually covers in eight or nine hours. But I did not mind it, my dear Miss Tanner. One sees so much in the four-and-twenty hours that is new and strange, that one easily forgets the length of time."

"What does madam mean?"

"The world has changed in these times; things have put on another complexion altogether."

Smiling, Miss Tanner looked at Melanie.

"Here, it is difficult to believe that, madam. At least here at Falkenstein, it seems to me that

the world is exactly the same as it was before the declaration of war."

"I should gladly believe you, if I could. That was how Falkenstein impressed me on my arrival, and I would cling to that idea; but yet——"

"But yet——?"

"But if one looks more deeply one sees that the calm is only on the surface. Humanity is at present wandering."

"Wandering? What do you mean, madam? Because the soldiers are being moved from east to west?"

"Oh no, I do not mean that at all. The impression of power produced by these enormous masses of soldiers, hurled as if by magic from east to west, that is after all only superficial, that is only what the shallow mind seizes, and admires and wonders at. But it is only at first that this will be felt, believe me. I see humanity wandering, Miss Tanner, and that is something quite different."

Miss Tanner's large brown eyes were fixed questioningly on Melanie's serious face.

"A strange idea," she said. "I thought it was the nation of Germany on whom everything turned. I thought it was something like a war of independence for Germany."

"You may be right, but from what I saw on my journey I have formed the unshakable conviction that this upheaval means the setting out of humanity towards new ideals, though few have any idea of it."

"I am not sure that I understand what you mean, madam."

"I cannot fully understand myself, Miss Tanner. I wish I could explain it, but time will make it clear."

The husk will fall off, and the kernel of truth will be ready to feed the nations ; this kernel for which they are now unconsciously fighting and struggling. Time will lead them to a goal which now they scarcely apprehend and perhaps would scarcely desire ; but which they must attain, whether they will or no."

"And what goal is it, madam ?"

"Ah, that I do not know. I can only feel it and yearn towards it in the midst of these earth-shaking events."

Miss Tanner mused for a moment. Then she resumed :

"Talking so much, I quite forgot to ask, madam, whether you would like something before dinner."

"What time is dinner ?"

"The same time as usual. Madam ought to remember that on this point the baron is adamant."

"I know. I remember. How could I forget the scenes father used to make if the soup appeared ten minutes late ?"

"Then may I bring madam something ? It is still a long time until then."

"Thanks, Miss Tanner, I should like something. I am quite hungry. I have not had anything to eat since last night."

"Perhaps a couple of eggs ? Johannsen, the new manager, has got hold of a stock of cochinchinas, and they lay assiduously, madam, delicious big eggs. They are Johannsen's pride, and the baron feeds them himself, when he is feeling well enough."

"And when he is not ?"

"Then it is my business, madam."

"A good thing too. I am afraid that Johannsen's cochinchinas might die of starvation some

fine day, if they depended upon my father's feelings."

"Méchante!"

"No, dear Miss Tanner, it's only the truth. Well, let me have a couple of the precious eggs, and some sausage, if we still make sausages here."

"Oh, yes: so long as there are any pigs left to us."

So saying Miss Tanner went to order the breakfast. Melanie put down the cat, rose, and went to the window. There on the window-sill stood the eternal row of flower-pots, as they had stood as long as she could remember. There they were, all labelled, all in a certain order; the cacti they held were the particular pride of the baron, and tended by himself. Woe to the unfortunate who happened to move one of the pots, for the baron could not bear to have them touched. His great ambition was to see the cacti bloom; a thing hardly to be expected in the ungenial climate of the Russian frontier. However, under his unremitting attentions, one of the cacti actually showed a red streak; and in the baron's opinion this was a blessed year. Melanie could have repeated the Latin names of the cacti as they were arranged, even now, so strenuously had her father plagued every one in the house with his hobby.

She left the window and went to chirrup to the canary. Under his cage stood the work-table—once her mother's, then hers, now Miss Tanner's. She took up the knitting that lay on it. Socks, of course; like every German woman, Miss Tanner was knitting socks for the defenders of the Fatherland at the front. Melanie knitted a few stitches. How long was it since she had done any knitting? Not since she was a school-girl; how many, many

years ago! Yet she went on with the work automatically, as a matter of course, just as the whole of Germany was knitting now, she thought. After all, perhaps that was the best thing, to fulfil these commonplace tasks without thinking of anything beyond. What was the universe? Only the conception of each one's brain, for him or her. Now her universe was Falkenstein; the narrow things of home. What was the conclusion of the whole matter? What could it be but resignation, acquiescence?

Melanie seemed to have been sitting there for ever. Lausanne, the Alps, Paris, the Rhine, her husband's house, seemed only the unreal shifting panorama of a dream. Adolf—was he too anything but a dearer and divine dream? This alone could be her life, to sit still and knit in the old changeless room. Her native soil reclaimed her; use and wont closed their doors upon her; and Miss Tanner, smiling kindly, came in and put down before her the sausage and eggs. At the same moment the baron appeared with Wuerz. He settled himself in his chair, and the old servant filled his long pipe.

One's own consciousness, that was all that existed for one. The storm of events that was sweeping the outer world sank in Melanie's realisation to the low moan of wind heard far off in the night. Her thoughts fell slowly through the deep waters of relinquishment, and the waves of habit and custom met over her head.

BOOK II
IN THE LOWER REGIONS

CHAPTER I

WHEREFORE MOLEST ME ?

AT the summit of the hill, high above the silvery ribbons of the Meuse, stood Château Monmiroir, a jewel of Rococo architecture hidden behind freakishly cut yew hedges. The days of Louis XV were vividly recalled to one who should walk, musing, along the paths of this park.

Marble statues stained by the showers of many seasons were ranged along the wide avenue of elms that formed the magnificent approach to the château. Diana with the hind, bow in hand, quiver slung across beautiful shoulders; Apollo with his lyre; Mercury carrying the boy Bacchus in his arms; haughty Juno, frowning Jupiter, gleamed against the background of centenarian trees. The roses were still in bloom in this golden autumn, but, like late butterflies, the flaming chestnut leaves fell without a sound on the close-clipped turf, where from a marble basin rose a slender jet of crystal-clear water.

Only last autumn, the Marquis of Armentières had entertained his friends from Paris here in the hunting season. On the day of the declaration of war he had left Monmiroir, where he had intended to hunt again. He also owned another not less magnificent estate—Beaulieu—and there, according to human calculation, one might be safe from

the enemy, at least for the present. The entirely modern Castelnovo, where he was staying now, looked down upon the never-resting waves of the Mediterranean. Only Labiche, the grey castellan, remained at Monmiroir, and now served the foreign, self-invited guests.

It was all sunshine at Monmiroir. The rigid smiles of the marble statues were unchanging, although the roar of the guns could be heard from the neighbouring fortress of Troyon. Clouds hovered above the district. They were not the fogs of the Meuse that rise from the river-bed during autumn. This terrible year was not yet advanced so far. It was the smoke of the gigantic mortars whose fiery mouths were trained on the armoured forts of Troyon, as they had been on those of Liège, and Namur, and Maubeuge.

And these clouds at the foot of Monmiroir came not only from the mortars. Down below in the plain the battle had been raging for days, for weeks. No advancing, no pushing back of the two living walls, standing opposite each other, both obstinately invincible. Thunder, rattling grenades, resounding shrapnel, the whistle of rifles, the whirr of machine-guns, the Satanic concert that was being played under the baton of the invisible conductor in the wide valley of the Meuse never ceased.

Labiche had got accustomed to the hellish noise. No longer did he shake his grey head as at first when the attack on Troyon began. He spoke no longer; he was silent since the leading men of Letang were shot because some one had fired from one of the houses—shot out of hand, and the village levelled to the ground.

From that day gloomy silence reigned at Mon-

miroir. For in the Rococo room, with its marble mantelpiece and wonderful Boule-clock, that once was the breakfast-room of the Marquis and his guests, now sat sergeant Wolf, arranging his regimental papers on the famous marble table that had belonged to the last Bourbon King. Sergeant Wolf was the secretary of colonel von Traumann, who had billeted the officers of his regiment at Monmiroir and slept on the down bed of the marquis.

The call of the electric bell sounded through the castle. And yet it was only half-past six in the morning, as Labiche remarked, no longer with astonishment—for in the days of the Marquis no bell rang before nine.

"The Boche rang," says Labiche to his wife.

He sat with the old lady downstairs in the kitchen waiting day and night for the orders of the omnipotents who had seized the castle of his marquis weeks ago. One day at sunset they came through the doors and windows like a swarm of wasps, as old Madame Labiche said.

Labiche shuffled upstairs in his felt slippers, which he still wore on account of the beautiful parquet flooring of the castle. He took his time, for there was no occasion to hurry when the Boche upstairs rang the bell. A thick red Smyrna carpet was laid on the white marble staircase, whose balusters of wrought iron and gilded bronze were the marquis's pride. Knee-breeched cavaliers, rouged and powdered ladies, looked sadly down from the walls out of the Watteau and Boucher pictures on the desecrated stairs, now thick with mud carried in by military boots from the beet-fields of the marquis's estate.

Old Labiche thought dejectedly of all that had

happened here during the last few weeks: his master's escape, he himself having been hidden for a month in the cellar while the shells flew over the château's roof; the entrance of the enemy; the establishment in Monmiroir of the officers of the regiment, already so long waiting inactive, billeted on the surrounding villages.

Labiche knocked discreetly at the door of the breakfast-room, that magnificent door of rosewood and Indian mahogany. Yesterday the sergeant flew at Labiche when he came in because his gentle knock had not been heard. Now the old man was prepared to knock twice or three times.

A grunt from the room—"Come in!"

Labiche crossed the threshold. The crop-haired sergeant, in his grey uniform, was sitting at the table, his head bent, his face buried in the blue foolscap documents, as if this were not a camp but a clerk's office, thought Labiche. Clumsily the sergeant's pen scratched across the paper.

Labiche peered suspiciously at the superb table, which the marquis had told him to guard as the apple of his eye. The sergeant scattered about the ink as if mother-of-pearl was no more to him than deal.

"You can bring me a cup of coffee, old chap," said he.

"A votre service, monsieur."

"Don't jabber—speak German, you know it," grunted the crop-haired one.

Labiche repeated his answer in German and disappeared. The sergeant plunged again into his work. The Boule-clock on the gorgeous mantel-piece struck—a quarter to seven.

The sergeant got up and knocked at the door leading to the bedroom.

"A quarter to seven, colonel."

"All right, Wolf, I am awake," answered a deep bass. "Anything fresh, Wolf?"

"Nothing, colonel."

"All right."

Colonel von Traumann got out of the great state bed canopied with tapestry representing the visit of Zeus to Danae. Water was heard to splash in the marble basin decorated with Florentine mosaics after the Pompeïian manner.

Labiche came in again, bearing the sergeant's coffee in a service of silver and Sèvres china, engraved with the marquis's coat of arms. He put it on the table before sergeant Wolf, who had had a wash yesterday for the first time for three weeks.

"Try the coffee."

"Je ne vous comprends pas."

"Don't jabber! You must try the coffee—drink! Boire!" ordered the sergeant contemptuously. Boire le café—we have been in Belgium and we are cautious, mon ami!"

Old Labiche did not quite know what to answer to this curious remark, but he remembered the men of Letang. Therefore with trembling hands he poured some of the coffee in the cup and drank.

"That'll do," said sergeant Wolf, after Labiche had drunk.

Meekly the old man inquired: "Est-ce que monsieur désire quelque chose à manger?"

"Leave off jabbering, will you?" But the sergeant repeated, "Manger? Quite right—manger."

Something like an air of satisfaction came over his face, the up-turned moustache of which horribly impressed Labiche.

"Have you got any ham, old fogey?"

“Monsieur veut-il du jambon ?”

“Jambong ?” repeated Wolf. “Right, jambong—bring me jambong, and don’t be a niggard with it.”

“Et du pain ? Bread, monsieur, bread ?”

“No thanks, we’ve got that ; bread in plenty, my friend. . . . And then prepare breakfast for the colonel—tea and two new-laid eggs. You have fowls at the château, haven’t you, old boy ?”

“Des poules ? Mais assurément, des poules !”

“For all I care it may be poules, or whatever the things are called. . . . And now hop it.”

Labiche was uncommonly glad to go before any harm should come to him at the hands of the crop-head.

Labiche outside, Wolf went to one of the exquisitely-carved rosewood cabinets which stood in the corners of the room. Out of this he took a loaf of brown bread and a knife, which he kept with the marquis’s antiques, his sixteenth-century miniatures, his statuette of Genoese filigree work. Wolf cut himself off a solid slice and began to eat heartily, enjoying the fragrant coffee which the marquis had sent specially from Aden.

Presently Labiche returned with the ham, and without a word busied himself in laying the table for the colonel’s breakfast.

CHAPTER II

FIGHTERS SCOUR YOUR LAND

SERGEANT WOLF condescended to open a conversation with Labiche. Finishing his coffee and the delicious Yorkshire ham, with the back of his broad horny hand, muscular from handling his rifle, he wiped his moustache, shining from the fat of the meat, and then lit a cigar. Biting off the end, he threw it on the floor and turned to the old servant, who looked up from his work and silently shook his grey head. Labiche was thinking of the marquis, so careful about the floors of the castle.

"How long is it since your master scooted?" asked the sergeant, and smiled like a hero who has successfully stormed Olympus.

"Je ne vous comprends pas, monsieur."

"But you have learned German, old chap. Where did you learn it?"

"En Allemagne, monsieur."

"Oh, in Allemagne, did you? Have you often been in Allemagne, old chap?"

"I went to Allemagne with monsieur le marquis."

"And where?"

"I was with monsieur le marquis in Wiesbaden and in Baden-Baden, because monsieur le marquis fut tres souffrant du rhumatism."

The roar of the guns before Troyon, starting again with renewed violence, interrupted the conversation and cut through Wolf's sally :

"But he was able to run in spite of rheumatism."

Labiche trembled all over.

"On y est habitué," he said. "Mais pourtant. . . ."

"Those are our new growlers," remarked Wolf. "Krupp and Co., Essen on the Ruhr, if the address interests you."

Labiche did not hear what the sergeant said. Moreover, there was a knock at the door.

Wolf, who correctly guessed the advent of a superior officer, jumped up and called out, "Come in !"

Captain Adolf of the eighth company came in. Labiche was off. It was instinctive with him to disappear as soon as he set eyes on a Prussian officer.

"Stand at ease, sergeant Wolf ! Is the colonel up ?" Captain Adolf went to the table and glanced at the documents that were lying about.

"The colonel got up about a quarter of an hour ago," reported the sergeant. "The colonel is taking his bath."

Sergeant Wolf pronounced the word "bath" as if he were a native, not of Bieberich, but of Berlin. He thought it smarter to pronounce his a's like that. He learned it during his two years' service in the barracks at Mayence.

Captain Adolf smiled.

"I believe, sergeant, the colonel gave orders to the Staff to be here at seven."

"Yes, captain."

"Right ; then take this report to the colonel, sergeant."

"All right, sir. I will take this report to the colonel."

Captain Adolf smiled again.

"I can quite believe that you understand German, sergeant, without your repeating my words."

Wolf got red. Was it not according to regulations to repeat a superior officer's words? And this one simply ignored the regulations with an ironical remark. The sergeant could not understand this kind of officer. It was true captain Adolf of the eighth was a sort of musician, and there had been a rumour about in Mayence that the colonel had once rated him for unmilitary behaviour. Wolf suddenly remembered this as he stood to attention, the command "stand at ease" notwithstanding, and observed that he knew quite well how to receive an order according to regulations.

Captain Adolf smiled once more, almost with pity.

"I commanded stand at ease, sergeant," he said; "but never mind. Tell the colonel that I am billeted at Vitry with the eighth company. Do you understand? Vitry—V-i-t-r-y. You had better write it down if you cannot remember it, in case the colonel should want me."

"Vitry, sir. All right, sir."

"Right!"

The arrogance which sergeant Wolf had shown to Labiche had considerably diminished. Captain Adolf took no notice, but resumed:

"This report was thrown down by an aviator from an aeroplane and found by one of the men of my company. I bring it myself because I attach great importance to it. Tell the colonel that,

sergeant. So I am, to repeat it once more, at Vitry."

Adolf did not think of his subordinate any further. His eye, schooled in Italian art during a long tour, wandered full of delight over the breakfast-room, and involuntarily he exclaimed: "The devil! You have fine things here, sergeant." Adolf paused in front of the cabinet from which Wolf had taken his bread, and inspected its contents.

"That is real Genoese work of the sixteenth century," he murmured; "curse it!"

"I beg your pardon, captain?"

"That was not meant for you, sergeant."

"Right, sir!"

The captain was not listening to Wolf. He was quite rapt, gazing at a small work of art which he had taken out of the unlocked case. He gently turned the little thing in his hand. It was an elegant group in silver, representing a Neapolitan mandoline-player to whose melody danced a dainty little lady. Adolf was charmed by the figures and had completely forgotten his surroundings. Such a specimen of Genoese filigree he had never seen before in his life, although he had explored every museum in Rome, Florence, and Naples. Yes, one finds a thing like this only by accident, if ever. He carefully put the little group back in the cabinet. His eye was next caught by the Boule-clock, a bronze Mercury; on the pedestal was the great French king's motto: *Nec pluribus impar!* The only one who could say that about himself, thought Adolf.

He dragged himself away from the objects which so captivated him, remembering that he had to issue his orders at Vitry.

He left the room, once more turning to the sergeant.

"So you understood me, sergeant?"

"Quite, captain."

Wolf clicked his heels together so that the parquet resounded.

Adolf went out.

Labiche had finished laying the breakfast-table for the colonel. Wolf examined it for the last time. Everything in its place, exactly as the colonel liked. So it was not in vain that yesterday he crossed the t's and dotted the i's for the old fogey.

Sergeant Wolf might have admired this breakfast-table if he had been captain Adolf; but happily for the good of the Prussian sergeants as a class, he was not. The lawn table-cloth, white as privet-blossom, the delicate porcelain cup, the solid silver tray, chased with arabesques and the coronet of the Armentières family.

For generations the family had remained Catholic and Loyalist to the backbone, and even now they used the lily of the Bourbons as their symbol. And yet the storms of war and of revolution had passed over France, had changed the Kingdom into a Republic, the Republic into an Empire, the Empire twice over into a Kingdom. A new Empire and a new Republic, but the Armentières remained what they were; the Armentières, who had their patent of nobility in the days of Charles the Seventh, whose ancestors had attended the entry into Rheims of the Maid herself.

But what should sergeant Wolf of Bieberich know of this? sergeant Wolf who was waiting for his pension; who would gladly have let France alone,

if he had not been ordered to shoot at the red trousers. He was only thinking of the colonel's breakfast. He had to be careful about it, because the colonel suffered from gall-stones, and the staff-doctor had prescribed a strict diet. When a gall-stone was coming things were apt to go badly with the regiment, and possibly the capture of Troyon might be prevented by a gall-stone.

That was what sergeant Wolf was thinking.

From these thoughts he was roused by the colonel's voice in the next room.

"Sergeant!"

"Yes, colonel!"

"Anything fresh? Has some one been? I thought I heard voices."

"Captain Adolf of the eighth."

"What did he want?"

"Brought a report, colonel."

"A report? Let me have it at once." The colonel's hairy arm could be seen in the doorway. The colonel had not yet put on his coat; he was in his shirt-sleeves.

Sergeant Wolf in two bounds reached the door with the report. A moment afterwards the colonel appeared completely dressed. He sat down to the breakfast-table and poured out his tea. His eye scarcely left the sheet which captain Adolf had handed to the sergeant. To-day he seemed to have forgotten his gall-stones. Yet the bread was not really properly toasted, thought sergeant Wolf, though the colonel had not noticed it.

Suddenly the colonel exclaimed:

"But that alters the whole situation!"

Sergeant Wolf looked up in astonishment.

Could captain Adolf's report really have been of such consequence that it made the colonel forget

his gall-stones ? Certainly, if the report came from an aviator, it might be.

The colonel turned to Wolf.

“ I gave orders to the gentlemen of the Staff to be here at seven punctually, sergeant ? ”

“ On the stroke of seven, colonel.”

“ And what do you make it now ? ”

“ Three minutes to seven, colonel.”

“ I think I hear steps outside ; there they are already.”

CHAPTER III

KEEN ARDOUR

THE regimental Staff came in, punctiliously according to seniority, even here at the front, before the enemy. First, major von Berkersburg of the second, then Braun of the first, last, Hottinger of the third battalion. After them the aides-de-camp, Von Schermer, regimental aide-de-camp and first lieutenant, lieutenants Hamann, Schlosser, and von Prittwitz.

Military courtesy before the colonel.

"Mornin', gentlemen."

"Mornin', colonel."

"Slept well?"

"Thanks, colonel, absolutely like God in France."

Berkersburg, as the senior major, risks this jest.

"Please be seated, gentlemen."

The Staff sat down, also in order of precedence: von Berkersburg to the colonel's right, Braun to his left. Then followed Hottinger, von Schermer, Hamann, Schlosser, and last little von Prittwitz, whose eye seems to be grown to his eye-glass.

"If you like to smoke, gentlemen," said the colonel, "I don't object."

He himself took a stout Havana from his cigar-case. All hastened to offer him a match. Little von Prittwitz won. He was the quickest; and before he was punished for his debts by transfer

from the cavalry to the infantry, he was a gentleman-rider. That still stuck to him through everything. The cigars and cigarettes were alight. In a few minutes the breakfast-room, where smoking had been strictly prohibited by the old aristocrat, was filled with blue clouds.

If Labiche had seen it ! But Labiche was downstairs again in the kitchen with Madame Labiche, musing in gloomy silence.

Sergeant Wolf had left the room as soon as the Staff-officers came in.

"Well, gentlemen," began the colonel, "the situation has suddenly completely changed. Consequently our discussion of last night comes to nothing."

Every eye was fixed on the colonel.

Little von Prittwitz dropped his eye-glass, which happily was secured by a cord. From sheer nervousness he began to clean his nails. He never could endure councils of war. He thought of his mount, which, as aide-de-camp, he was allowed, thank Heaven, to keep when he was transferred to the infantry. In his Uhlan regiment they used to call the infantry "Sand-hares." "Sand-hares"—that just expressed it.

"Thoroughly changed," repeated the colonel. "Captain Adolf of the eighth brought me this report."

"Captain Adolf ?"

The question came from major von Berkersburg.

"You understood me correctly, major ; captain Adolf of the eighth. Is there anything astonishing in that ?"

"Of course, colonel, for captain Adolf is billeted upon Vitry with his company."

"Certainly."

"But how would an enemy outpost allow a despatch-rider to get to Vitry, colonel? It must clearly be an aviator's report?"

"Clearly, major."

The colonel's tone was impatient. Major von Berkersburg observed it, and was silent.

"The report seems to me to be of the utmost importance, gentlemen."

The suspense increased.

"For it says," the colonel continued, "that strong enemy columns—no number is given—have been sighted marching towards the forest behind Troyon. As you know, gentlemen, it is our task to delay the enemy until our left wing has completed the investment of the fortress. As you also know, our regiment is the only one still available as reserve for this object, as all other units are engaged."

"Yes, colonel."

"Our task is simple—and serious, gentlemen."

At that word "serious" a shudder seized lieutenant Hamann. The mobilisation order had reached him during his honeymoon, when he had been married exactly eight days; in such circumstances the word "serious" has a rather bitter taste.

"We must therefore occupy the forest of Troyon," the colonel continued calmly, "until the investment of the fort has succeeded; and delay the enemy, if it should take an eternity."

"As you say, colonel."

"Before everything it is essential to beguile the enemy into the belief that the forest is strongly held. The underwood will render us most excellent service in this."

"Certainly, colonel."

"It is therefore : hold, gentlemen, hold until the last man. In open order, with the greatest possible distances between, and hold, hold, hold. We proceed by companies. Only, if one is cut up, the next advances. Understand, gentlemen ?"

"Certainly, colonel."

The colonel made a long pause and gnawed his white moustache, as he always did when he was about to make a disagreeable announcement. At last he said it :

"The battalion which starts first may be lost, gentlemen."

He was silent again for some time, then, hesitatingly, like one about to pronounce a sentence of death, began :

"The . . . the . . ."

Major von Berkersburg interrupted.

"I respectfully request, colonel, that I may advance first with my battalion."

The colonel smiled contentedly. The major had relieved him of a task which, as a human being, he felt to be a particularly difficult one.

"As you ask, major von Berkersburg, I grant your request. The second battalion of major von Berkersburg will advance first. Of course, I feel quite convinced that the first and the third will not less courageously look death in the face."

Protestations came simultaneously from major Braun and major Hottinger.

"Then follows the first and after that the third battalion. And now, gentlemen, three cheers for his Majesty."

"Hurrah ! hurrah ! hurrah !"

The hurrah from poor Hamann's mouth sounded somewhat thin. He was thinking of the postcard from his Mechtildis, which the field-post had

brought him this very morning and on which she wrote of all possible beautiful expectations and trust in God. And now the task was "simple and serious."

The colonel rose and shook hands with each.

Going to the door he called to sergeant Wolf and ordered him to trot out his "goat." Colonel von Traumann called every service-horse a goat.

The colonel was gone.

"The business may come off somewhat later, gentlemen," said major von Berkersburg. "Experience shows that such reports generally come quite early, even if they are not simply a hoax."

All breathed again, more or less relieved at the major's words.

"So there is still time, if you like, to send a picture post-card home—and please help yourselves. Cards and ink are here in profusion, as you see. Don't you want to, lieutenant Hamann?"

"I'm already at it, major."

"Please remember me to your wife, lieutenant, if I may ask."

"Many thanks for your kindness, major."

"How long had you been married, Mr. Hamann, when the mobilisation order arrived?"

"Exactly eight days, major."

"Of course, of course; my wife and I attended the wedding. How can one forget a thing like that? Well, send my regards."

"Thanks, major."

The others had also settled down to writing. Only little von Prittwitz was leaning against the mantelpiece deeply engrossed in thought.

Von Berkersburg went up to him. He felt no inclination to send a card to Melanie, although he had received a long letter from Falkenstein that

morning. "Give Adolf my kind regards," said a postscript. As if, since that night, he would not have known that her last thought would be for Adolf, not for him! "Eight days. Yes," he reflected bitterly. "Three years, No, when one is twenty years older than the bride, and has paid off the father-in-law's mortgages."

"Have you no one to write to, Prittwitz?" he asked the lieutenant.

"No, major."

"Nor I."

"Well, gentlemen, when you are ready," said major Braun.

"Ready, major."

"Then please ask the captains of my battalion to come to my quarters."

"And mine to mine, lieutenant."

"Certainly, major."

"You might ask my officers to come here, lieutenant; that is the simplest," von Berkersburg directed.

Von Berkersburg was left alone.

CHAPTER IV

MALICE'S ANGER SUPERVENES

TAKING his field-glass, von Berkersburg went to the window. What a glorious view there was from it over the Meuse Valley! But he was not there to admire scenery, beautiful as it might be. His eye was searching the forts of Troyon, just then being bombarded by the great siege mortars, in which he took as much pride as if they had been his own invention. He had been present at Liège, and he had looked on when Louvain crumbled to pieces.

A single shot from such a gun costs sixteen hundred pounds. The report rolls over the earth like a peal of thunder; miles away the window-panes in the villages are shattered; and after a few discharges the gunners become completely deaf. It was of this that von Berkersburg was thinking as he searched the horizon. The thunder crashed out. He focused his field-glass on the left armoured turret of fort Troyon.

That was a hit!

"Troyon is on fire!" Berkersburg said to himself with delight. He jerked open the collar of his tunic. The sight oppressed him as if he could not draw breath, in spite of his joy. He searched in his pocket for a letter. Drawing it out with shak-

ing hands, he read it quickly through again, grinding his teeth. It would have seemed impossible, impossible, if he had not seen it with his own eyes. . . . Women . . . women. . . . It was Melanie's letter brought to him by a cyclist at the moment of his departure. Impossible. . . . Impossible. . . .

He felt an impulse to tear the letter to pieces and scatter them to the winds, but he thought better of it and carefully returned it to his pocket. He would be calm, quite calm, he would test himself, and then act . . . yes, he must act. Adolf would come; he would inquire from the cyclist whether any news from Falkenstein had arrived, and he would come. Until then, perfect calmness . . . then he would make his arrangements . . . and . . . the life of the whole battalion had been placed in his hands to-day.

Automatically he pressed the button of the bell. His throat was painfully dry, and the cellar of the château was full of the choicest wines. He heard that from colonel von Traumann, who was forbidden to touch wine on account of his gall-stones . . . "only Fachinger water, disgusting . . . only Fachinger," which has been brought in the baggage-wagon.

Labiche appeared.

"Vous avez sonné, Monsieur?"

"Oui, j'ai sonné."

Von Berkersburg's accent grated on Labiche's nerves. Sergeant Wolf's murdering of the language was quite refreshing in comparison. The major's French had the harshness born of parade-grounds and barrack-rooms, but he went on in German; his surroundings forgotten for the moment, his mind busy again with the hypocritical letter.

"Have you any champie, my friend?"

"Je ne vous comprends pas, Monsieur; champie, qu'est-ce que c'est?"

"Champagne, champagne, mon ami."

"Certainement, monsieur; je vais en chercher."

Von Berkersburg went back to the window. Troyon was burning. The turret was hit. It must soon fall and bury the garrison in its ruins. How many would there be? At least two hundred and fifty. The major smiled with pleasure. That shot would pay for itself; if the turret fell. Why, a good deal more than £5 a head. His calculations were interrupted by the entrance of Labiche with the champagne.

Von Berkersburg drained his glass and felt relieved. Labiche made to leave the room.

"Stop, my friend; I did not mean that."

"Vous désirez, monsieur, encore une bouteille?"

"No, no . . . but we pay cash for everything . . . here you are, my friend."

A five-franc piece changed hands.

"Merci beaucoup, monsieur."

As Labiche went out the sound of an approaching footstep was heard—a footstep that Berkersburg knew only too well. How often had he jealously listened to it at home! It was Adolf's.

The captain of the eighth entered the room.

"Morning, Berkersburg."

"Morning, Adolf."

Notwithstanding the difference in age and rank, the two said "thou" to each other. At a dinner years ago, the major, becoming expansive for once, had invited his comrade to use this sign of intimacy.

"Looked for you here, Berkersburg."

"Did you? very good of you."

"Yes, the old man ordered the Staff here. I supposed you might be here."

"Very kind . . . yes, the old man ordered the Staff here at seven; quite correct. Have a glass of champagne?"

"No, thanks."

"Well, if you won't. They have good stuff here, at any rate, and cheap. . . . You won't often get such cheap champagne, old fellow."

"Very likely." The tone was indifferent.

Could he have heard something? But no, he was usually *posé*. . . . Musician, lyric poet. . . . Berkersburg shrugged his shoulders.

"Look; Troyon is on fire."

"On fire?"

"See for yourself; take my glass."

Adolf stood by the other's side at the window. His eye scanned the prospect, from which the flames of Troyon rose up before him like a burnt-offering.

"Our growlers made a thorough job of it."

Adolf tried to turn the conversation.

"What a gem this *château* is with its park! One might dream here of the days of the *Roi Soleil*, of Versailles, *Trianon*."

"Did you come here to tell me that, Adolf? There was a letter from Melanie, that was the reason why you came; you heard it from the field-post."

"Exactly . . . I came . . . for that reason. Will you let me see the letter? Always assuming . . ."

"With the greatest pleasure. . . . Melanie and I have no secrets together—least of all from you."

"You speak strangely, Berkersburg?"

"Oh, you think so, do you?"

"It is only natural that I, as an old comrade and

friend of the family, who has been permitted the privilege of visiting you daily, should be interested when a letter from Falkenstein arrives. Do you not consider that quite natural, my dear Berkersburg ? ”

“ Certainly I find it only natural. What else . . . or did you think perhaps—oh no . . . there ; . . . but be quick . . . the others will be coming directly. I have asked them to come here on account of a report you brought the old man.”

“ So the report was an important one ? ”

“ Of the very greatest importance. We’ll talk about that presently ; but read the letter now. You may skip the passage about feeding the fowls and pigeons at Falkenstein, the idyll of the poultry-yard.”

“ But be glad, when she is happy and bright and writes calmly, Berkersburg.”

“ Oh yes, I am glad.”

Adolf was absorbed in the letter.

CHAPTER V

HOW CRUEL IN MIEN !

"FINISHED?" asked Berkersburg, after a long silence.

"Finished, thank you," replied Adolf, handing him the letter.

"Well?"

"I am very happy."

"Really, Adolf?"

"Really, Berkersburg. I am happy that she has settled down at Falkenstein and resigned herself to the circumstances. That is all one can do."

"And the Russians haven't yet called there?"

"That too; but Hindenburg is looking after that."

"Seems like it . . . the main point is that you are happy. I presume that was what her letter was meant for?"

Berkersburg emphasised the "you." His eyes glittered savagely. But the danger-signals passed unnoticed by Adolf in the consciousness of his innocence, and the completeness of his confidence in his friend.

Berkersburg gnawed his moustache, and suddenly exclaimed:

"To-day you will die, my friend."

Adolf stared at him, amazed, incredulous, inquiring. Then he replied simply:

"I am prepared."

The major scrutinised the captain's face, trying to read his soul. It was the look with which he examined his men when a culprit was before him. Adolf knew that look. He returned the other's gaze with a serene smile. He would have started, Berkersburg thought, if he had possessed her. If he hoped to return to her arms, he would have started and flinched as Hamann did, when he thought of his young wife at home. Or could he be such an adept in disguising his feelings? Or did he disbelieve and expect to escape?

With an intent look, Berkersburg repeated:

"You will die to-day, my friend."

Calmly Adolf replied:

"I fully understood you, Berkersburg. I shall die, and I am prepared for it. Everybody is prepared for death, who went out in *this* war."

"In *this* war. Is it different from other wars, Adolf?"

"Entirely different."

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? In this war only numbers count, and neither courage nor strength."

"Only numbers?"

"That is what I said. We are all merely counters; the first are entered in the loss-account, perhaps the last will be entered in the profit-account. All that matters is who has these last counters."

"Is that how you look at the matter, Adolf?"

"Exactly. Those who possess the last reserves will be victors in this campaign. Troyon is in flames; it was set on fire by machinery. Machines do not ask for heroes, only for numbers; that is what I think. War upon machinery is an absurdity, Berkersburg."

The latter flared up :

"We are not expected to criticise, Adolf."

"I abstain from all criticism, Berkersburg; I merely state a fact. Armoured turrets and mortars are here the decisive factors, neither courage nor strength; least of all genius."

"Indeed? . . ."

"Yes, indeed. Therefore I am prepared. It is a gamble, nothing more; but the stakes are different, Berkersburg, because life and life are two. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"I leave it to your own judgment to decide; the Hindu and the Turk, the German scientist and the French philosopher, who are opposing each other here, are not equal stakes, in my opinion. I cannot feel any enthusiasm in a game at which the one stakes peas and the other sovereigns. But now to business. You tell me that I shall die to-day. . . ."

"Yes: the report. . . ."

"That I brought? . . ."

"The same. It says, as you know, that strong enemy columns have been sighted by our scouts behind the forest of Troyon; our regiment is to occupy the forest until the investment of the fort of Troyon has been completed by our left wing, 'even if it should take an eternity'—so the colonel said—understood?"

"Perfectly, Berkersburg."

"I begged the colonel to give the second battalion the privilege of occupying the forest of Troyon, Adolf."

"You were quite right. I should have done the same in your place. After all, it makes no difference when the number falls out of the urn; it does—

fall out: it is sufficient for us to know that, and reckon with it."

"So we must hold, hold, until the last man. We proceed by companies, you understand, Adolf: when the first company is cut up, the next takes its place. We must deceive the enemy as long as possible about our real strength; must lead him to believe the forest is held in force. We must stand our ground as long as possible. You comprehend, Adolf?"

"Entirely. I quite understand you, Berkersburg, and I am prepared."

Again Berkersburg's piercing glance explored Adolf's face. That face told him nothing. It was inscrutable. Berkersburg relinquished his effort to read those serene features. Let Adolf settle it with himself, let him take his secret with him into the tomb. Berkersburg must remain in the tortures of doubt, if he himself survived this day. But was it necessary for him to survive it? For a moment he felt a devilish exultation. Yes, he would survive, to bring her the news of her lover's death, to look into her eyes when he told her, "Yonder in the soil of France, in the forest of Troyon, is a crowded tomb; your friend lies there with many others."

"But . . . company after company, the whole battalion to the last man . . . to the major. . . ."

He too ceased to speak. He whistled softly:

"Oh, my boy, you'll die to-day!
And yet you are so young. . . ."

It suited him and his mood, his opinion of mankind, that song. Berkersburg's cynicism revolted Adolf for a moment. But he knew Berkersburg. That was the tragedy of the two. This was

Berkersburg's surface-expression, and Melanie could not see beneath it.

"Well, philosopher?"

"If you call me that, Berkersburg. . . ."

"Well, I am all ear."

"You do me too much honour. I am only an artist—no, scarcely an artist, merely an amateur at most; but I love my art."

"I know . . . tra-la, tra-la. . . ."

"If you can summarise art in those notes, Berkersburg, I admire you. I am so thankful, you cannot provoke me to-day."

"To whom are you thankful, what are you thankful for? . . . To me, perhaps, for the situation we find ourselves in? Speak up, man."

"I am so thankful to life, Berkersburg, and fate. To life, because it has given me this day; to fate, because it has sent me to this country and this campaign."

"I am deeply interested, philosopher; one lives and learns. Go on, by all means."

"If you wish it."

"I tell you so."

"Can you understand me, Berkersburg, if I tell you that all this time the values have shifted in my mind?"

"You are getting out of my depth."

"You can understand well enough, if you will. I once had a wish, Berkersburg: in this hour before death, I need not conceal the truth from you."

"What do you mean?" asked the other wearily.

"But I can guess what you mean."

"So much the better. My wishes and this wish in particular have become different during these weeks."

“ Different ? ”

“ Yes, different, Berkersburg. All this fighting, for material things only, has made me realise the insignificance of material things. Love has become for me an inspiration, friendship an ideal, set free from externals. Everything is a source of new tones, new melodies. And I can tell you this, Berkersburg, before the smoke of the ruins of Troyon I could not have borne it otherwise. And further ; I love the country into which we are hurling this conflagration, Berkersburg, upon whose soil we shall bleed to death to-day. I can find no hatred in my heart, and that is why I am happy. Do you understand ? ”

“ I am trying to follow you.”

“ Do it, Berkersburg, do it. . . . You will reap the reward, if fortune wills that you see home again. Let your soul spring anew out of the soil of this country, soaked with blood ; this soil, the cradle of all the great ideas of mankind. We, too, are seed laid in the soil. Do you understand ? ”

Berkersburg was silent. Thoughts to which he could not give voice were struggling within him. He was relieved to hear outside the footsteps of the approaching officers. The captains appeared : Mueller of the fifth, Brennert of the sixth, and Lachmann of the seventh company.

CHAPTER VI

OVERPOWERED BY AN EVIL SPIRIT

THE death-destined of the second battalion came in smiling. They did not guess what was before them.

Brennert, the eldest, was first, with his lined face and compressed lips. He had four children at home and an ailing wife at Arosa, and the anxieties of years had worn those furrows in his anxious features.

Mueller was a picture of exuberant health. He was nicknamed "The Foot-ball" of the battalion, round but elastic, nearly as broad as he was high. At parade he always cut a miserable figure, a laughing-stock to the regiment when he was a lieutenant. His short legs were not adapted to the goose-step, and his ideas of dress and deportment were to seek.

But Mueller was ever jolly, though he was an inveterate bachelor, for the simple reason that his suit was unhesitatingly rejected by every eligible maiden, however cautiously he might proceed. At last he had given up the pursuit, settled down in single blessedness, and seemed to thrive on it. After all, this campaign was a blessing for Mueller, and more effective than seven cures at Marienbad.

Lachmann was in every way his antithesis.

The soldiers of the company never called him anything but "The Greyhound." He was as tall and thin as a bean-pole, looked like an English team's champion, and had indeed won notable matches at Homburg.

"Please be seated, gentlemen."

The "Foot-ball" was about to crack a joke as usual, but it died on his lips. Berkersburg's voice had an intonation that brought to all the conviction that something serious was impending.

Adolf remained standing at the window, gazing at burning Troyon. He knew what the major had to announce.

It made Berkersburg nervous.

"Won't you sit down too, Adolf?"

"Certainly."

In an earnest and solemn tone Berkersburg began:

"Gentlemen, by the colonel's orders I have to give you this information. Captain Adolf has brought an aviator's report, which alters the arrangements that had been made."

The three captains looked inquiringly at their major. Only Adolf's eyes roamed round the room, and settled finally on the beautiful clock, inexorably telling the few remaining hours of life.

Berkersburg continued:

"The colonel called the task that falls upon us 'simple and serious.' We have to occupy the forest of Troyon, behind which large enemy columns have been sighted, with company after company until our left wing has succeeded in surrounding Troyon. I begged the colonel to give us the privilege of being the first, and I know that you will concur."

"Assuredly, major."

Now Berkersburg brought out his trump, which should win the game between him and Adolf.

He went on :

“ According to the colonel’s orders we are to act by companies, hold, hold, hold, to the last man. Such is the colonel’s command. When one company is cut up, the next advances.”

For a moment Berkersburg hesitated. Adolf’s clear blue eyes were suddenly fixed upon him. It seemed to him that Adolf had divined his intention and expected nothing else. Curiously, just then flitted through Berkersburg’s mind the recollection of a long-ago scripture lesson at the Military School. Thirty years ago ; but clearly Berkersburg could hear the words :

“ And David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah, and he wrote in the letter saying : ‘ Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten and die.’ ”

He pulled himself together.

“ The eighth company under Captain Adolf will start first. . . .”

His voice broke. The eyes of the two men met : the dark eyes of Adolf, in which dawned a sudden comprehension, and the steely eyes of Berkersburg, gleaming with triumph. He repeated his words :

“ The eighth company under captain Adolf will be the first to go. You understood, captain ? ”

“ Perfectly, major.”

That word “ perfectly ” fell on the air like a sentence of condemnation, and Berkersburg’s eyes avoided Adolf’s clear calm glance.

“ Then follows in reversed order the seventh, the sixth, and lastly the fifth company.”

"Yes, major," they replied as if the arrangement were a matter of course.

"Having regard to the quality of my battalion, gentlemen, I consider it superfluous," Berkersburg went on, "to add any recommendation to my order. I know that the men, like my officers, are all animated by the same courage in the face of death. There only remains for us to cry,

"Hurrah, his Majesty!"

Berkersburg rose.

"If you have anything to settle, gentlemen, I believe that there is some little time left, before the colonel will have the call sounded."

The captains got up.

Advancing to Berkersburg, Adolf offered him his hand.

"Good-bye, Berkersburg."

"Good-bye, Adolf."

And a whisper in Berkersburg's ear :

"Be kind to Melanie; do you hear?"

No reply. He left the room. Adolf went to the window . . . burning Troyon . . . The others sat down to the table, and began to write.

As was well known to the whole barracks, "The Foot-ball" had a little girl in the garrison town, a compensation for his many refusals. She was true and faithful, and, as she had been a sempstress, kept his shirts in good repair. To her "The Foot-ball" sent a last greeting on a field-postcard.

Brennert would have had to apologise to his wife for so many things, and much more to his four children, unprovided for. It was not all the fault of the sick wife, he felt at this last moment, but he could not find the right words to express that, or anything else. So this last letter was made up of stock phrases, and jokes that had circulated in

the mess, jests that rang hollow, laughter in the face of death.

"The Greyhound" was the only one at ease. He had a rich old aunt in Berlin, and he thought of her in these serious moments. He was fond of philosophising, and had a poetical strain in his temperament. He was now thirty-six, and the rich aunt seventy-seven. He scribbled verses on his postcard; it was odd how easily they came to him, to-day—verses in which he explained humorously why a lady of seventy-seven had a better chance of life nowadays than a man of thirty-six.

For Adolf there was no one to whom to write. He might have written to Falkenstein, but all had been said, all had been confessed in those last hours before the departure. There was no more to say.

The hands of the clock irrevocably moved on. So they had moved in the flying hours when the marquis and his guests drank and laughed.

"How the hands crawled!" thought Adolf, but they crawled implacably on.

A heavy rumble struck on his ear. He took up his binoculars. The fortress of Troyon had fallen!

Bugles called below the château.

All hurried out.

CHAPTER VII

THE DESIRE OF MOVEMENT

THE woods behind Troyon were like a primæval forest. They formed part of the hunting-ground of the marquis of Armentières, whose immense wealth had permitted them to remain intact for scores of years. At the western boundary of the forest lay the wretched hamlet of Rosey. The thick growth of underwood made the forest nearly impenetrable. There were no paths, if any had ever been made they had disappeared long ago. Owls nested in the century-old oak-trees, and a host of cross-bills quarrelled over the ripening autumn berries.

Axe in hand, the eighth company hacked a road through the wilderness, the other companies of the second battalion following. The first and third battalions came on at a distance, for it was impossible for a large column to press through. The French were said to construct shelters in the tops of forest-trees and shoot at the enemy unseen from above; therefore the greatest possible caution was necessary. But during the march of over seven hours, nothing suspicious had presented itself; the forest of Troyon was as yet free of the enemy, who probably were only starting on their march from Rosey.

At last the vanguard of the eighth company

arrived at the western boundary of the forest, and Adolf gave the order for open order. From between the last trees of the forest the quiet fields of Rosey could be seen; from the chimneys of the cottages smoke rising into the blue sky announced the hour of noon.

“Take cover. . . .”

The firing line of Adolf's company, of about two hundred and fifty men, spread out along the border of the forest. The rifle-barrels were almost invisible among the high grass, which made the marshy border ideal cover for a firing line. For hours the men lay waiting. There was nothing to be seen, near or far, but the squares of the meadows and the thatched roofs of the brown cottages of Rosey, beyond them the silvery Meuse and the interminable poplar-bordered road along which the enemy's columns would probably advance.

Adolf was kneeling behind the firing-line in the tall reed-grass, binoculars in hand. The heated air shimmered and trembled over the fields, over the dusty road; not a sound was to be heard but the tap, tap of an industrious wood-pecker, undisturbed by the moveless men.

During the long, monotonous waiting the thoughts of the men and officers wandered hither and thither in ceaseless unrest. Here were more than two hundred and fifty human beings, with more than two hundred and fifty varying interests; but all tormented by the same terrible but half-enjoyable expectation. Each of the two hundred and fifty was longing to come to grips with the enemy: all longed to destroy. Why? They themselves did not know. They hated these men, whom they never in their lives saw; not one of them had suffered any harm at the hands of these men,

yet they hated them with a profound hatred ; they who had left love and friendship, life and possessions in their far-away home, and every moment longed to return. They desired to destroy the enemy, that was their only thought in this hour, the one idea binding together the whole heterogeneous mass. To destroy, destroy at any price, or be destroyed themselves.

The beast of prey that sleeps in every man woke into life.

Destroy. . . . destroy destroy at any price, in order not to be destroyed.

Their eyes gleamed, their pulses throbbed. They felt neither hunger nor thirst, neither the scorching heat nor the exhaustion of the march ; they longed to destroy : and in this feverish desire time sped on unnoted. Thoughts of the past and the present were submerged in an ocean of blood ; they could see already the enemy they awaited falling beneath their bullets. Nothing to be done but wait, and wait.

Blessed was he who had pipe or cigarette, for tobacco is the bread of the battlefield. So they smoked, and waited to destroy those whom they knew not, but only hated, and whose destruction had become the chief end of their existence. Cartridges in the ammunition-belt, cartridges in the bread-sack, cartridges in the boots, cartridges between the buttons of the tunic ; they seemed to be alive only to serve as receptacles for implements of destruction. They were more precious than bread or water, more precious than sleep, than love, than friendship in these hours, these cartridges. Every shot must reach its aim, must cost an enemy his life ; and at this moment these means of death represented the sum of all that was most desired.

Far off, where the poplars became one with the horizon, a hardly perceptible cloud of dust rose to view. All eyes were strained, all hearts throbbed, every hand itched to pull the trigger and let loose death. Teeth were clenched—oh for a shot to relieve the tension! but the captain gave no command.

Nearer and nearer crept the cloud of dust; imagination saw column after column of the enemy: every nerve was on the stretch. Ten minutes more and a weary smile crept over the tense faces—it was nothing. Nothing but a team of oxen, driven by a peasant, pacing peacefully along the white road.

Suddenly across the fields floated the soft notes of a chime. They came from the red-tiled spire of Rosey. It was Sunday, and the bells were calling the inhabitants of Rosey to service. But the tones of the calling bells woke no echoes in the hearts of these men.

Yet here and there arose in the soul of one and another the image of the church of his native village, inextricably bound up with all the experiences of their youth and manhood. It was there that they went to communion for the first time, with high aspirations and the desire to keep the commandments of God, one of whose commandments was, "Thou shalt do no murder." And now, at the edge of the forest, they awaited the enemy, hand on rifle, their only desire to kill and kill.

Plaintively, appealingly, sounded the bells of Rosey. Presently the curé would be speaking to his people, just as the parson at home used to speak—"May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." Peace!

The bells of Rosey were silent. The sun was near the horizon. The low, golden light fell aslant over the reed-grass at the edge of the forest. A bee hummed over a sage-blossom, then laden with pollen, flew up in the sweet air on its way to the bee-hive of a little cottage in the quiet hamlet.

And once more stillness fell : nothing far or near, nothing on the high-road. So they waited.

CHAPTER VIII

GREATER GRIEF IS MINE

NEAR the skirts of the wood there was a small open space which years ago the marquis of Armentières had had cleared in order to erect a hunting-box there; but the underwood had grown up luxuriantly again and the rich green of grass and heather covered the ground. In the midst, on a small hillock, stood an old beech-tree, whose foliage was whispering softly in the gentle breeze. From this position major von Berkersburg might command the action and arrange for the advance of the supporting companies. It was only a couple of hundred yards from here to the border and the firing line of the eighth company.

Lieutenant Schlosser, his aide-de-camp, stood by his side. The horses of both officers were peacefully grazing under the supervision of Baumann, the major's stable-boy, who had followed him from the garrison into the field.

"What do you make the time, lieutenant?"

"A quarter to six, major."

"Then it seems to have been another false alarm; I thought this aviator's report was a hoax of the enemy. Those chaps are up to anything."

"Probably, major."

"Give the order for serving rations. The men must eat something."

"Yes: they have had nothing since the start."

The aide-de-camp went to bugler Schweigler and the call rang through the silent forest.

Dismissing Baumann, Berkersburg turned to the lieutenant.

"Tell me, lieutenant——"

"Yes, major?"

"I suppose that, as a civilian, you are a poet?"

Schlosser looked amazed at his major.

"What gives you that idea, major?"

"Very simple, lieutenant. I have observed that you do nothing but write. Usually only poets do that."

"I really do not know whether I may claim that noble title."

"I like that, Schlosser; 'noble' title is good; but don't hide your light under a bushel; I have it from the best authority."

"If you think, major——"

"No, my dear fellow, it isn't what 'I think.' My position as your superior doesn't give me the power to turn you into a poet 'par ordre du mufti.' The battalion is singing at this moment a song that is said to have been written by you, and that song is not half bad. Tell me, Schlosser, I have some sort of idea that you meant to swap horses, and get out of his Majesty's uniform, before the order for mobilisation came."

"That is so, major."

"And you wanted to become a poet, riding Pegasus and that sort of thing, like comrade von Lauff . . . ?"

"Hardly that, major!"

"What else, with your talents?"

"Well, you know, major, that before the war began I had something left me by an uncle in

Mexico, of whom I hardly ever thought—enough to make me independent.”

“You lucky bounder, I might have called you, Schlosser, if it had not happened differently, and if you had not the honour of being aide-de-camp to the second battalion, here in the forest of Troyon. I very much doubt whether either of us will leave this forest alive, supposing that report was not a hoax.”

“I fully appreciate that privilege, major.”

“Oh, don’t, old chap! A man who possesses capital, wants to become a poet, and has life still before him. . . . How old may you be, Schlosser?”

“Four-and-twenty, major.”

“Four-and-twenty and here in this forest. . . . But, never mind . . . what did you think of making of your future, lieutenant? I am interested in that. . . . I’ll tell you why that interests me. . . . I am now nearly fifty, and I’ll tell you, although I might be your father, a man like me has not the slightest idea of what life is. Good heavens! Where should we get it? Yes, not the faintest idea what life means. Drill, drill, drill, year after year, a whole life long, first as lieutenant, then as captain, then as major; always the same. Father soldier, grandfather soldier, and so generations back until the period of the great Elector. You’ll say that it is the blood. Blood be damned! When one comes to the settling day, it makes one pause. Educated in a military school, then at Gumbinnen, then in Forbach, you can imagine the sort of life, can’t you? Wife from the same set. . . . Mother too, what more do you want? You also hail from Berlin, lieutenant, if I am not mistaken?”

“Yes, I do hail from Berlin, major.”

“And went to the Grammar School?”

"To the French Grammar School, major."

"That too! Don't you see, there it is. Berlin, a city with a thousand influences, Grammar School, chums with a hundred various interests, now probably doctors, lawyers, engineers, artists—— But I wanted to talk about you and various others. What were your plans, lieutenant?"

"I wanted to matriculate for Berlin University and study History."

"And now you are making history, and such history! That is something. . . ."

"I should think so, major."

"Oh yes, one *should* think so. But you know, Schlosser, in leisure hours, I have also read; you need not think that one deteriorates entirely, not even in Gumbinnen and Forbach."

"Why should I think that?"

"Well, I had my pet book, think of that. You would never have thought that a martinet like Berkersburg could have a pet book?"

"Why not?"

"You won't believe me when I tell you the title of it. It is nothing less than 'Faust,' and in that I found the word which to-day we should all take to heart."

"I am fearfully curious, major."

"I can quite believe that, Schlosser, when you suddenly discover unsuspected talents in your superior officer. Well, the phrase is: 'Thou thinkest thou dost push, but thou art pushed. . . .' That is what happens with us all the time; not only my battalion and the regiment, that had not the faintest idea this morning what it might expect in the forest of Troyon to-night; but the whole army, Germany and the world. The whole universe may say, 'We think we push, but we are

pushed.' Believe me, mysterious powers are at work, of which only very few have the faintest idea. It is those powers who are making history, and their intentions are something quite different from ours, and from what we think we are fighting for, my dear fellow. That was always the case, even in the days of the Old Testament. Saul went out to look for his father's asses, and found a kingdom."

"You surprise me, major."

"I can believe that, Schlosser. These things come to my mind, when I am hanging on my 'goat,' a cigar in my jaws, and trotting on through the enemy country day after day in front of the battalion along the dirty roads. Then I say to myself that there must be a reason for everything according to the laws of nature, and something underneath all history from the beginning to the end."

"No doubt you are right."

"Have you no doubts about it? But, as you study history and want to become a poet, I venture to tell you this to-day. . . . Did you ever hear anything about Mirabeau, lieutenant, as you wanted to study history?"

"Certainly, major."

"Mirabeau was, as is well known, something like the greatest statesman of Europe at the beginning of the Revolution; a sort of French Bismarck, only a few inches taller than our iron Chancellor, about in the proportion of Napoleon to old Fritz."

"I follow you, major."

"I can assure you this is the first time I have spoken so freely to any one. Perhaps because you wanted to study History, and finally won't succeed in consequence of the cursed position we are in.

You probably won't be able to tell any one about it. Well, this Mirabeau. The story goes that in the hour of his death he said to his old valet : ' Keep my head ; it is the strongest one in France.' . . . But he was mistaken, as the following pages of the Book of History show. He thought he pushed, but he was only being pushed . . . and, as a matter of fact, by the times, lieutenant—for that is the joke of all history."

" I am afraid I do not quite understand, major."

" Oh, I believe you, I take your word for it. . . . Well, to cut a long story short, Marat, Danton, and Robespierre were the stronger ones, especially ' the Incorruptible ' ; and he would have come with and without Mirabeau, because History will not be hindered. Mirabeau only laid the foundations ; Napoleon accomplished the work. Well, we ourselves, we are standing at the beginning only . . . the beginning of a big push. . . ."

" You really think that ? "

" If I did not think so, should I waste my time in explaining it to you, the future professor of History ? No, my friend. In Versailles they had not the faintest idea of the Place de la Révolution, when they were cracking jokes about the great Rousseau. . . . But here comes the soup. . . . So I hope you may enjoy your dinner, lieutenant."

CHAPTER IX

SENSE DECEIVED AT A DISTANCE

A PRIVATE of the field-kitchen brought the officers their food on tin plates ; boiled pea-sausage and bacon.

“Delicious,” exclaimed lieutenant Schlosser.

“Oh yes, dear comrade, if one has not had a hot spoonful inside oneself from eight in the morning until six in the afternoon, even pea-sausage and bacon are pleasing. Otherwise one would not think it possible. . . . But in fact, our tinned foods are quite excellent, and these chaps know how to cook like the chaps in the Boulevard-restaurants, where we shall arrive if the Lord wills ; and if not we, then the others. But one would hardly think . . .”

“What do you mean, major ?”

“That any one would touch that stuff, considering the luxury in the Army.”

“Do you think, then, that there is so much luxury in the Army ?”

“Do I think so ? Of course, I do not refer to you, present company always excepted of course. And then you are a Berlin boy ; that excuses a great deal. But . . . well, his Majesty has preached about it enough, but all to no purpose. Evil communications corrupt good manners. You must

not take it amiss if I speak plainly, but right is right."

"Why should I, major?"

"I don't suppose you do. There was no restaurant grand enough, no wine expensive enough, no woman elegant enough, that's how it was; and the motors and the marriages! God help us!"

"You are severe, major."

"You call that severe?" Berkersburg laughed.

"No, I speak from what I saw. He who could not catch a fortune, remained a bachelor. Is that true or not, Schlosser?"

"In many regiments it was like that, major; that is so."

"In many, you say? I assure you one corrupted the other. Since the factory-bosses and the wool-kings had their way in our beloved Fatherland; since his Majesty hobnobbed with stockjobbers in Hamburg and Frankfort; true or not, Schlosser?"

"Well, it did occur, major."

"And the week-ends, and the races, and the Kiel week and the Royal Automobile Club, and everything connected with it. Do you think I can't see what's under my nose, and don't understand what it all means, what they are after? They are after the whole, old chap, after 'world power,' or whatever these gentlemen call it—after capitalism. This is not the first time I have thought about it, though it is the first time I could say anything about it. I have thought it all out, during those silent days on my goat's back, and that is why I said that about Mirabeau. He was prepared to save the monarchy of Louis XVI, under certain conditions, and at one time he advertised himself as Marie Antoinette's friend, although he was her born enemy. And now..."

“And now?”

“And now I stand here deeply amazed and astonished at the innate power that uprises from the deepest depths of this people, that now struggles—I fear struggles in vain—for existence.”

“You fear that, major?”

“That is my private opinion, Schlosser—you need not talk about it.”

“I’ll take jolly good care not to, major.”

“All right. Just look at what is around us. It is such a pity. What morale, intellectual, artistic power there is in these fellows! You are a poet, Hamann is something of a painter, Adolf a born musician and composer. That is three that just come to my mind in one battalion. Is it not amazing, Schlosser? And all of you know nothing better than to let yourselves be shot down by some dirty Turcos from North Africa. And all moved by an idea—well, perhaps a great and redeeming idea . . . one often comes across great riddles in one’s life.”

“Yes, major, life certainly is a great riddle.”

“A very great, a psychological, an ethno-psychological riddle, and riddles like the present one are the worst and the most difficult of all, because history gives the answer to them only long after we have all ceased to be. Only our grandchildren will be able to decide what we wanted to do to-day—or, rather, what others wanted us to do. For, as I told you, we are much more passive than we all think. Will you have a smoke, Schlosser?”

“I don’t want to deprive you, major.”

“Oh, please, I have a case full. My old woman had the happy thought of sending them for a love-gift to the front. You have not the faintest

idea what it means to have so sweet a little wife."

"I certainly have not, major."

"There you are. And if Adolf's report turns out to be right, I shan't be even able to finish my case, so you'll have to take a hand in it. I remember that you always liked smoking these cigars after my wife's dinners."

"You may say that indeed."

"They weren't bad little dinners when my wife dressed the salad herself. She always said they taught her that in England, in perfidious Albion, as we are now expected to say. Do you remember her way of moving her hands when she had turned up her sleeves?"

"I only remember madam von Berkersburg in evening dress. One she had on I remember, a steel-grey dress like silver armour, or a serpent's skin."

"Like a serpent's skin! That's a curious comparison, Schlosser."

A look of gloom came over Berkersburg's face and Schlosser feared for a moment that his simile might have seemed insulting. He added hastily, "It was merely a comparison that suddenly occurred to me, major; I hope you did not misunderstand it?"

"Not at all; comparisons occurring to one suddenly are always the most apt. If one stops to hunt for them, one never finds a good one. And this one is particularly apt."

Berkersburg remained deep in thought, gazing at the turf of the open space, where a couple of ants were labouring industriously at the transportation of infinitesimal bits of wood. Presently he turned to Schlosser and asked:

"Are you very intimate with Adolf?"

"Perhaps that is saying too much, major," said the lieutenant, surprised. "I take it that an intimate friendship is something different."

"What do you understand by it, Schlosser?"

"Well, for example, intimate friends would exchange secrets."

"And captain Adolf does not do that with you, lieutenant?"

"Why no, major. Of course, bachelors always see more of each other than married men. We dine together every day at the mess, and now and again a confidential word is spoken, or a joke is cracked, which might as well or better have been left unspoken; but that is all."

"What do you mean by a joke that might better have been left unsaid?"

"Well, one talks about various matters."

"Including the ladies of the regiment, Schlosser?" Berkersburg looked at his aide-de-camp intently. The unconscious Schlosser replied, naturally:

"That is a matter of course. But I can assure you the ladies of the regiment are always discussed at the bachelors' table in the most respectful manner."

"Indeed, only in the most respectful manner?" said Berkersburg, smiling. "The manners of youth seem to improve. In my time, when I was still a lieutenant we also preferred to talk about the ladies of the regiment, and I can assure you we had our nicknames for them."

"Oh, well, we have nicknames for them now, major."

"Are those too among the respectful expressions?"

"Sometimes, yes. But are you thinking about anything in especial that you speak about this just now?"

The wild, maddening jealousy which flared up in Berkersburg's soul at Schlosser's question, drove out all idea of caution. "Yes, now," he said, grimly. "Now, I must ask you on your honour and conscience, Schlosser, whether my wife and Captain Adolf were ever mentioned together at mess in any connection?"

Schlosser looked at the other with a very straightforward expression as he answered in a convincing tone:

"I can say 'no' to this question, upon my honour and conscience. In my presence, madam von Berkersburg and captain Adolf were never mentioned together in any conversation at all."

Berkersburg shivered: "You are sure of that, Schlosser?"

"Upon my honour and conscience, I am."

A bugler appeared, announcing:

"Bugler Winkler of the eighth company, ordered as relief to the Staff of major Berkersburg."

"You belong to the eighth?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may bless your stars, my man, or otherwise, according as you look at it, if you have been ordered away from the eighth; take your stand beneath that birch."

"Right, sir."

Berkersburg got up, binoculars in hand, and walked down the hill to the edge of the forest. Presently he returned.

"Nothing to be seen, Schlosser, far or near. This aviator's report was a downright swindle."

"It looks like it, major."

CHAPTER X

FREEDOM OF THE WILL ANNULLED

"EV'NIN', major."

It was colonel von Traumann's voice.

The head of the colonel's horse appeared through the trees.

"A deuce of a road, or rather no road at all, here through the underwood."

"Rather, colonel."

Traumann reined up in front of the major and his aide-de-camp.

"Wanted to see for myself what's going on here, major."

"Right, colonel."

Von Traumann dismounted with an agility that would have allowed no one to suspect that the rider was fifty-six.

"Hold the colonel's horse."

The bugler took the bridle and moved a short distance off.

"Well, no news from the firing-line, major?"

"Absolutely nothing, sir."

"Looks as if we had put our foot in it, as far as that flying-box is concerned, major."

"Looks quite like it, colonel."

"Well, you never can tell."

"Of course not, colonel. The French have played many a trick on us."

"I think they have in this case, major. In 1870 it was quite a different matter, although I know that only from hearsay. But, hang it all, at that time everything went off like lightning under our Fritz."

"At that time we had a certain Moltke at the head of the lot, colonel."

"What does that imply, major?"

"Why, then battle after battle. . . . Weissenburg, Woerth, St. Privat, Gravelotte, Sedan, Paris."

"And now?"

"The deuce! now it's as if we had harnessed snails to our mail-coach."

"Do you think so, colonel?"

Von Traumann smiled.

"Always the same thing," he thought. "Do you think so, colonel?" He had no conception what independent, not to say, revolutionary, thoughts were hidden beneath Berkersburg's unimpressible exterior. The major had done his work irreproachably for years and years, but in his soul something lived that had long ago risen above the commonplace opinions with which he was surrounded.

"What did you mean, major?" the colonel asked.

"In the service it is my principle never to mean anything, colonel."

"And outside the service?"

Berkersburg smiled a quizzical smile. The colonel was disagreeably affected by that smile.

"Speak your mind to me quite unreservedly."

"I'll take good care not to do that," thought Berkersburg. "So long as there is any chance of that report being true, I'd rather not."

"Well, sir?"

"I was thinking of Schiller, colonel."

"Happy thought that, major, to think of Schiller in the forest of Troyon, waiting for the enemy. But, never mind, let fly, major, for goodness' sake."

"Yes, sir, after all, there is nothing more interesting in the world than mankind. One thinks at a certain hour of his will, another of his lady-love, and I—well, I think of Schiller."

"But I should say, major, that at such a time one ought to think, in the first instance, of one's Fatherland, one's Emperor, and one's duty."

"Quite right, sir. One should think so, theoretically; yet mankind, if I may be permitted to express my opinion, is very different from what it would seem like according to the newspapers. According to the newspapers they seem all of one mind, but——"

The colonel, not quite pleased with this, made a diversion :

"You were saying something about Schiller."

"Right, sir; yes, about Schiller. I only thought of a line in his 'Don Carlos,' when you asked me what I thought of the difference between 1870 and the present."

"Which line from 'Don Carlos'? Go on, you interest me."

"Wait a minute. How does it go? Oh yes, something Posa said to Philip :

"I'm not, I must confess, prepared at once
To clothe in words which might your subject suit,
What I as the world's citizen have thought,
For then, when I for ever left your court,
I thought I was from the necessity
Of giving reasons for that step released."

After a pause, the colonel said :

"Never took you for a literary man, major."

"I am not one; only an amateur, a dilettante in many aspects of life, that is all. A dilettante in life, that says more than enough. But that's what I am; and I cannot refuse to admit it, especially now."

"Indeed . . . indeed."

The colonel murmured the word in his beard. His face became serious, but he ended by thinking, "He is right; it does not matter much what one thinks in this hour, when in the next he. . . ."

But, half aloud, he resumed: "As the world's citizens! Are we that at all, have we ever been that, if we are capable of thinking as we do think nowadays? And these lines are to be found in 'Don Carlos,' in which they deal with Alba and the Netherlands, with Flanders and Brabant? Remarkable, remarkable, how he thought of it, and what he is driving at. . . . 'The world's citizen'?"

Berkersburg hardly caught what the colonel murmured. It did not really matter very much what colonel von Traumann, however efficient a soldier he might be, thought about Schiller, "Don Carlos," about himself, or "the world's citizen," about Flanders and Brabant, now called Belgium. The colonel seemed to feel this. He turned to Berkersburg in quite the conventional manner, saying, hand at helmet:

"Thank you very much, major. The firing-line is probably at the forest boundary."

"Yes, sir, hardly three hundred yards from here. . . . Captain Adolf, with the eighth. If lieutenant Schlosser. . . ."

"No thanks, major."

The colonel picked his way through the wood. Ten minutes after he was standing behind the firing-line. Adolf ran up to him.

"Please don't trouble, captain."

After what he had had to listen to, he did not care for any more philosophical conversation. The army was composed of such a variety of elements, thought von Traumann, no wonder! How could they all be of one mind, as was daily asserted in the newspapers, and as those in high places might think, because they considered themselves judges of human nature, but never were anything of the kind?

Nobody could tell what this Adolf might want to treat him to. Every one of these Germans had his head full of undigested philosophy. . . . It looked otherwise, but it was only on the surface. . . . With the rank and file it was, thank goodness, a different thing.

The colonel walked up to a private who was lying on his stomach, between the tall ferns, rifle in position for taking aim, and staring at the high-road.

"What's your name, my friend?"

The man involuntarily turned round.

"As you were," said the colonel in a friendly tone. "Don't turn round; you know it is against the regulations to turn round."

"Yes, sir."

"All right then. Tell me what sight would you use if the enemy appeared there on the road, near that big tree?"

"Whatever sight the lieutenant ordered, sir."

"Quite right. But suppose for a moment that the lieutenant were for some reason prevented from ordering the sight. Suppose he had been wounded or killed, which sight would you use then, if suddenly enemy cavalry became visible near that big tree?"

"Which big tree, sir?"

"The poplar, standing there quite by itself, where the footpath runs into the high-road."

The private considered.

"Sight 1200, sir."

"Correct, nearly correct . . . how do you know?"

"Because, sir, the captain gave the order before: Sight 1200, in case enemy columns should appear near the tall poplar, where the footpath runs into the high-road," the soldier answered frankly.

The colonel walked on.

"Good-evening, friend, and God bless you."

"Good evening, sir."

Von Traumann went along the line, pausing behind another private. This one did not turn round at his greeting: "Good evening, my friend!" A more intelligent one.

"Tell me, my friend," began the colonel, "if you use sight 1200, do you aim at the middle of the object?"

"No, sir."

"Where do you aim, then?"

"In the case of a man I aim above the head."

"Why above the head?"

"On account of the trajectory of the bullet, sir."

"What does that mean—on account of the trajectory of the bullet?"

"In consequence of the laws of gravity."

"What is your civic occupation, my friend?"

"Doctor of philosophy, colonel."

"Oh, I see, one-year volunteer. What do you read for?"

"Physics, colonel."

So it was always the same story, all drill notwithstanding, always the same, the colonel thought;

and then those high up talk about something like the Spirit of the Army . . . the Spirit ? . . . the sight as commanded by the lieutenant. . . .

He had had enough of his examination.

He called out,

" Good evening, comrades."

" Good evening, colonel," sounded through the forest.

" Good evening, captain."

" Good evening, colonel."

Musing, von Traumann walked through the forest, back to the open space and the world's cities. He called for his " goat," jumped into the saddle, and rode away after a silent salute. His duty required that he should also inspect the other companies in reserve.

CHAPTER XI

REDUCE THYSELF TO ASHES

A LITTLE over half an hour had gone by since the colonel left the open space. Suddenly rang out captain Adolf's clear voice from the boundary :

"Attention, direction of fire central, sight 800, independent fire !"

Berkersburg started.

"So, after all, Schlosser, no hoax."

He turned to his aide-de-camp. The slim figure of the lieutenant erected itself; the lust of battle suddenly sparkled in his blue eyes.

"Seems so, major," he briefly replied.

The recent conversation, the study of history, the profession of a scientist, the uncle's inheritance, were clean forgotten. One thought only—"at them"—dominated both men.

Again captain Adolf's voice was heard :

"Attention, direction of fire, tall poplar, on right, sight 900, independent fire !"

The rattle of rifles rose above all other noises, rendering the commander's voice inaudible. A magpie flew screeching from the high branches of the fir, by the side of the old beech, under which major Berkersburg had taken his stand, and winged its way farther into the wood.

Calmly von Berkersburg gave the order.

"Sound, 'fall in,' for the other companies."

The bugler placed the bugle at his mouth.

Sharp, warning, shrill, its tones echoed through the forest, piercing through the crackle of the rifles.

A second, a third, a fourth bugler answered from the far distance, in token that the leaders of the companies understood the signal.

Again Adolf's voice :

"Attention, on the left, direction of fire Rosey spire, sight 600, independent fire !"

"The deuce ! They seem to come from all sides, Schlosser."

"Looks like it, major."

"Let's have another smoke; soothes the nerves."

Berkersburg offered his well-stocked case to the aide-de-camp, who took a cigar in silence.

"Attention, direction of fire central, sight 500, independent fire !"

"It goes like lightning," said the major. "Remarkable how those chaps managed to get so near without being seen."

The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders.

"The entire population here plays into the hands of these fellows, major. A village may look as peaceful as possible, the peasants may pull ever such stupid faces, one never knows what is hidden in these cottages and behind the walls of the farms."

"You are quite right, Schlosser, one never knows."

"Rabble, major, franc-tireurs, traitors, wherever one looks. Fellows who ought to hang on the nearest tree or be knocked down with the butt-end of one's rifle, because it would be a pity to waste powder and shot on them."

Berkersburg smiled his superior smile.

He became more calm as the situation became more dangerous, considering the whole from the

standpoint of his peculiar philosophy, of which in peace-time no one had suspected him.

"You say that in such a matter-of-fact way, Schlosser, because you too . . . I hope you will not take it ill of me that I took you too for a budding poet-philosopher."

"But how could I, major?"

"Well, in one word, because you simply echo what others said before you. I take a different point of view."

"You take a different point of view, major?"

"Certainly, if you'll kindly allow me, lieutenant."

"But please, major——"

"In considering this matter you always overlook this one point, my friend, that we are in the country of the enemy, and not the other way round."

"What has that to do with it, major?"

"Why, this. In the first place, we cannot have any franc-tireurs in our country because our people had as yet not to suffer from the horrors of the war. Only a country where the furies of war rage can bring forth franc-tireurs."

"And you believe that would be the case with us in similar circumstances, major?"

"Not only do I believe it, Schlosser, but I might say that I hope it."

Schlosser stared at his major in blank amazement.

"Don't look so astonished at me, lieutenant, because I, a loyal Prussian officer, find the courage to tell you the truth against all service regulations, in this hour, that may determine the issue of life and death. Really, one would soon find other names for the franc-tireur if accidentally he should emerge some day on the right instead of the left of the Rhine. . . . If one's farm is on

fire, one does not ask whether one has a red collar to one's coat or not, but takes up arms and shoots, here and in all other countries of the world. It has always been so, my friend. A German poet made a hero of the man Tell, who assassinated Governor Gessler from an ambush, in order to deliver his native country from a tyrant. And this poem became immortal, and is read and learned by heart in Prussian schools. That speaks volumes. . . . For the rest . . ."

Adolf's command, to which neither had paid any attention for a while, was heard again :

"Attention, direction of fire straight ahead, sight 600. Fire !"

Suddenly Berkersburg lifted his head.

"What is that, Schlosser? don't you hear? Those are not Mausers."

"No, major—machine-guns."

Both listened tensely to the sounds from the forest edge.

Again Adolf's voice rang out :

"Attention, direction of fire straight ahead, sight 400. Independent fire !"

The rattle of the rifles answering the command became weaker and weaker, slower and slower. The intervals became longer.

"The enemy's machine-guns seem to be taking effect," Schlosser stammered with ashen face.

Berkersburg stared in front of him, silent, biting the ends of his moustache.

Schlosser looked at him inquiringly. At this moment the aide-de-camp had the impression that his major was suddenly changed, no longer the man of a little while ago, who talked of Schiller and "Don Carlos," no longer "the world's citizen," whom he could not understand.

Schlosser was right ; Berkersburg had become indeed a different man, had suddenly and completely changed within two minutes. The hardness and cruelty which had seemed to leave him now tightened his mouth. His inner eye was looking far off, at Wirballen, at Falkenstein, in whose castle a woman was pining—but not for him. The one woman whom he had tried to conquer but could not because he had bought her, because he had mistaken mankind and deceived himself. The one, the one, who was sorrowing, in this hour . . . sorrowing, thanks to him.

Schlosser looked at the other horrified. It was almost as if he could read the thoughts of his superior officer behind that brow of steel, which had never yet betrayed anything that the mind willed to conceal ; as if he saw with his own eyes this awful determination, just now fixed on some crime of which no one could convict him.

At last Schlosser stammered :

“The firing of the eighth company seems to have become alarmingly weak, major. Shan’t I go and see for myself ?”

“Stay here, Schlosser.”

The old imperious tone, which Berkersburg had not yet used that day, was heard in this answer and made it an irresistible command.

“Yes, sir.”

But Berkersburg did not heed him. He heard only Adolf’s well-known voice from the distance, and, hearing, he turned pale.

“Attention, direction of fire straight, sight 400. Independent fire !”

Only a couple of shots responded.

Berkersburg ground his teeth.

“The fellow seems bullet-proof.”

"Did you say anything, major?"

"Nothing to you, lieutenant."

He dug his sword in the mossy ground, deep in the soft soil. Schlosser turned away. His brow glistened as if with the death-sweat at the thought of those who, hardly three hundred yards away, were being sacrificed, one after the other, by the will of the man before him.

Once more Adolf's voice was heard.

"Attention, direction of fire straight in front, sight 300. Independent fire!" One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five shots dying away . . . hopeless . . . like the cries of drowning men: then—silence . . . only the terrific answer from the enemy's machine-guns. Suddenly a report like thunder shook the air.

"Enemy artillery!"

Like the moan of a wounded animal came the ejaculation from Schlosser's lips.

A second, a third, a fourth report. . . . Enemy artillery. . . .

Through the thud of the shells as they struck the ground rose again Adolf's voice.

"Attention, enemy artillery, direction of fire straight in front. Sight 1,200. Independent fire!"

"The fellow fights like a lion," thought Berkersburg. Still he remained motionless. A private from the firing-line rushed out of breath into the clearing. Berkersburg, whose thoughts were somewhere else, at the front by Adolf's side, this Adolf who would not die, stared at the arrival as if he were a ghost. The man tottered.

"You are wounded," exclaimed the major.

Schlosser took out his field dressing and bandaged the wound.

"Forehead grazed ; nothing important," said the lieutenant.

But the man swayed on his feet.

"Can't you stand up, my man ?"

The question came from the major's lips like a cry of distress, and the private pulled himself together, his confused brain suddenly remembering who spoke to him and why he was there.

"Captain Adolf respectfully requests that reinforcements be sent, major ; we have only twenty-nine men left of the whole company."

Berkersburg's face was inscrutable, but a quiver went through his whole body.

"Tell the captain that the colonel's order is : 'Hold, hold, hold, until the last man.' You understand : until the last man."

"Right, sir."

The wounded man began to feel his way past the firs and beeches of the forest, to take the major's order to the captain.

He was lost to sight. Only Adolf's voice rang out in the distance, always Adolf's voice.

"Attention, enemy artillery, straight ahead, sight 1,000. Independent fire !"

Again came the terrific report and the thud of the shells.

"Damnation !"

The oath escaped von Berkersburg's lips, for even after this detonation Adolf's voice was still heard.

At last Berkersburg turned.

"Sound the call for seventh company to advance and attack."

"Right, sir."

The call pierced the air, answered presently by the bugler of the seventh company.

CHAPTER XII

DIRE AGONY

WITH torturing slowness the minutes of another half-hour crept by. The seventh company is too far away to the rear, thought von Berkersburg, and the road through the forest was no road at all. He strode impatiently to and fro on the grass.

The fire of the eighth, weaker and weaker, sometimes died down for minutes at a time. But always Adolf's voice, hoarse now from crying: "Attention, enemy artillery from the right, sight 1,000. Independent fire," rallied his men.

At last he went again to the bugler.

"Repeat the call, bugler, seventh company advance."

Again the call pierced the forest, again the bugler of the seventh company answered; this time much nearer.

Berkersburg breathed again.

"Thank heaven, Schlosser, they are coming," he said with relief. "They are coming, they will be in time."

"Yes, major."

Shrapnel whistled over their heads as the rattle of the machine-guns broke out afresh and the shells crashed in the forest.

"Have another cigar, lieutenant; it is the only thing."

"No thanks, major; I can't smoke any more."

"Nerve gone?"

"I'm all right, sir."

The lieutenant pulled himself together. Anything but that! The tremor that for a moment shook the young man did not escape Berkersburg. He did not hide a smile. Was it possible, thought the lieutenant, that Berkersburg could smile at such a moment, when the last men of the eighth company were being sacrificed? He felt that the major would sacrifice himself with equal sangfroid, out of no enthusiasm, but from the intellectual conviction that it was in honour demanded of him by his position.

Absorbed in these thoughts, he looked at the other, who suddenly addressed him:

"Take command, while I go to the firing-line."

Mechanically Schlosser assented.

He understood the reason why Berkersburg wished to go to the firing line. The firing of the eighth had ceased, Adolf's voice was heard no more, the silence of death had taken its place. He would have held back the major, for just then another shell crashed down and burst in a flare of sulphur-yellow that lit up the whole clearing. It was too late. Schlosser saw the major disappear with long strides between the trees of the forest, as another private of the eighth ran up the hill, hardly able to speak.

"What do you want?"

"Captain Adolf sends me to ask again for reinforcements. When I left we had only eleven men."

The man's voice is drowned by a jubilant "Hurrah!"

The infantry fire once more became brisk,

Schlosser recognised the voice of the captain who had interposed with his men at the right moment ; the seventh company had arrived at the firing-line.

"The reinforcements are already there, my man," said Schlosser, with a deep breath of relief.

The messenger, one of the eleven, without hesitation hurried off to rejoin his comrades. Arrived at the firing-line he threw himself down on the grass, reloaded, and felt for the trigger. Before he could fire a cry escaped from his lips. He saw the tall figure of the major, encouraging his men, sway and fall.

"The major !"

"Sergeant !" shouted Adolf.

A head emerged from the grass.

"Take command."

"Right, sir."

Ignoring the bullets that fell as thick as hail-stones, in three bounds Adolf was by Berkersburg's side.

"Are you wounded, Berkersburg ?"

No answer.

"For God's sake, speak ; are you hit ?"

Adolf drew his friend towards him, glancing round for assistance. His eyes fell on one of his men.

"Help me, Kamm—the major."

Kamm rolled himself along towards the two officers.

Under the incessant hail from the machine-guns it would have been madness to stand up. They took hold of the major's unconscious body.

"Up to the clearing, out of range," ordered Adolf.

Crawling on all fours through grass and bushes,

their one thought how to save the life of the commander of the battalion, the two succeeded in placing the wounded man in safety. The loss of blood seemed to have drained him of vitality : Not a sound or a movement.

"We cannot get to the clearing ; he'll die under our hands, Kamm," panted Adolf. "There, underneath the shrubs, we are safe."

With a last effort they dragged the unconscious man under the shrub.

"Where is it ?"

Adolf tore open his friend's tunic.

"Nothing to be seen, Kamm ; where can the wound be ?"

The captain's face was burning red, but he shivered as with icy cold.

"We must save him, Kamm."

"Right, sir."

The crackle of rifles, the rattle of machine-guns, the detonation of bombs, the crash of shrapnel, punctuated their words.

At last Kamm exclaimed :

"Here, captain, here."

"Where, Kamm ?"

"In the wrist, through the large artery."

"Hold the arm up high, Kamm, as high as you can."

"Right, sir."

Kamm held up the major's arm with one hand and with the other pressed forcibly upon the wound. Adolf tore off his coat.

Pulling off his shirt, he ripped from it a long narrow piece of linen, which he fastened tightly round the wrist, and with the aid of his pocket-knife, improvised a kind of rough tourniquet. The stream of blood lessened presently to a trickle,

then to a few drops. At last it ceased. The immediate danger was over.

"Thank, God!"

"Now let us carry him carefully to the clearing. The fire has abated."

Arrived there they laid the major down at the feet of his aide-de-camp.

"What is it, captain?" cried Schlosser.

"He'll come to, lieutenant."

"Do you think so?"

"See for yourself."

And indeed a tinge of red appeared on the marble face of the major. Five minutes passed. Then Berkersburg opened his eyes.

"Where am I?"

"In safety, Berkersburg."

"You, Adolf?"

"Yes, it is I."

"Where have I been?"

"In the firing-line."

"Oh yes. . . ." The major slowly collected his thoughts. "What happened there?"

"You were wounded in the wrist by a shell splinter. It cut the artery; a good thing that it happened close by my side."

"And you . . . you. . . ."

"Why, naturally. What else should I do?"

"You, Adolf!"

The major's lips could hardly speak the name. His thoughts fell into darkness, and unconsciousness again drew over him its impenetrable veil. Presently he muttered, "Water, water. I am on fire."

As tenderly as a mother, Adolf put to the dry lips his flask of cold coffee.

"Oh, good, good," went on the half-unconscious

man, muttering, the brain ignorant of everything but the contact of the cool liquid with the parched throat.

Adolf jumped up.

"Come along, Kamm, Lieutenant Schlosser will look after him."

Captain and private hurried back to the firing-line, and again to Schlosser's ears came the accustomed command :

"Attention ! Sight 600 . . . independent fire !"

The fight went on. One after another the three companies in reserve were moved up and ordered to advance.

By nightfall, Berkersburg's battalion had been almost destroyed. But he knew nothing of this. Lying under the old beech in the cold light of the moon, just then serenely rising over the spire of Rosey Church, consciousness slowly crept back. His first thoughts were of Melanie. How were things going on by the Russian frontier ? What was happening at Falkenstein ?

Weary and exhausted, Berkersburg could not order his thoughts ; his eyes closed again. And through his confused dream of blood, tears, fire, jealousy and love, still rang, clear and firm, the tones of Adolf's voice, as he rallied the remnant of his company.

"Attention ! . . . sight 600. . . ."

Like the steady notes of the bugle ever and anon sounded that voice through Berkersburg's fevered dream.

BOOK III

THE BANNERS OF HELL DISPLAYED

CHAPTER I

DESPERATE GRIEF OPPRESSES THE HEART

FOR eight years Pierre Bugnon had been mayor of Rosey. In all these eight years he had not known so much excitement in his small community as during these last weeks, since the famous Berlin telegram arrived in Paris, and the amazed world, two days later, saw itself faced by the brutal fact of the invasion of Belgium.

Pierre Bugnon was a widower nearly sixty years of age, in proportion to the size of the hamlet quite a large property owner, and proprietor of the only, and therefore most flourishing, local inn, the Café du Raisin.

He was standing in dejection at the entrance of his establishment and blinking at the sun like a cat awakening after a long sleep. Over his not too clean white shirt he wore a blue blouse, a cap with a red, white and blue tassel protected his bald head.

Pierre Bugnon was out of sorts. Business had not prospered since the youth of the village was called to the colours, and the events of the war drew closer and closer round Rosey itself; and now a battalion of these "Prussiens" had marched into the village and was billeted on the farms. The whole of Rosey was swarming with "Prussiens." They overran all the rooms and barns, com-

mandeered all the food and drink, and most of the peasants gave the Café du Raisin a wide berth, because some of the enemy were billeted there, and one never knew whom one might meet in the café.

The times were difficult, one had a lot to put up with, thought Pierre Bugnon, scratching his head. He seemed to be looking at the weather, but in reality other thoughts occupied his mind, for the major, with a face as if he would not allow any one to take liberties with him, half an hour ago, had sent word by a French-speaking orderly, that he was coming to the café. Pierre Bugnon had no idea what the motive of this visit might be, but the descent of a "Prussien" upon him was not likely to betoken any good. He went back into the tap-room wondering what the major might mean to commandeer now, for commandeering could be the only explanation.

At the table near the window sat three peasants playing cards.

"Bonjour, messieurs."

"Bonjour, père Bugnon."

The peasants scarcely looked up from their cards. Jeanne Loisir, the mayor's niece, who served in the café, was standing behind the bar. She turned to her uncle with the remark that the cider in the jar was nearly all gone.

"Vas-en chercher à la cave."

Pierre Bugnon went up to the table, looked at the cards of the peasants, and lighted the bit of cigar which he was holding between his teeth.

"Tu as de la chance, Marteau."

Marteau did not look up. Resting his unshaven chin on his hand, he growled something unintelligible, that sounded like an oath.

"De la chance, et les Boches dans le village."

"How many have you got billeted on you, père Marteau?" asked Bugnon.

"The devil," answered Marteau. "Just as many too many as I have got, mon ami."

"Et bien tu donnes, père Marteau," muttered the second of the peasants, Rosse by name.

The third only nodded his head violently, and the three fell to their game without another word. There was never much conversation going on at the Café du Raisin, and to-day the general mood was particularly depressed.

The Prussians had won the battle in the forest behind Troyon, notwithstanding the superior power of the French. There was no possibility of doubt, for now they had occupied the village. And Rosey was seething with anger.

Pierre Bugnon went behind the bar just as Jeanne Loisir came up the stair from the cellar.

"Where is Louis?" he inquired.

"I don't know, mon oncle."

"You don't know?"

"No, I don't know," insisted the young girl, who might have been called exceptionally pretty if her slovenly appearance had not detracted from her charms. But, in spite of her dirty apron and her soiled gown, Jeanne was a dainty creature. Before the young men of Rosey had set out, the village beauty of eighteen, in her Sunday best, enticed them all to her uncle's café.

"So you don't know where Louis is?" repeated the mayor.

"No, mon oncle, I do not know."

The old man returned to the peasants, as he wished to discuss politics with them: perhaps he might succeed better with the third than with Marteau and Rosse.

“Alors, Cherbullion, et vous, vous êtes content de vos Boches ?”

Cherbullion was a small hunchback. His freckled face was twisted into a satiric grin, as he replied :

“Content, Pierre Bugnon, fort content . . . they won’t eat a poor devil like me, les Boches. I should frighten them.”

The mayor laughed.

“They’ll find a way to make you eat first, Cherbullion ; faut attendre, mon cher, faut attendre. When the Boches get hungry, faut attendre.”

The grin on the hunchback’s face became diabolical.

“Sapristi, bon appetit, mes Boches. Between ourselves, père Bugnon, my old woman has still some arsenic in the house. You remember that last winter we could not live for the rats at Mon Désir. It lies too near the water, and when, last autumn, they filled up the canal, the rats came en masse to the farm.”

“I know, I know.”

Père Bugnon shuffled back behind the bar, and helped himself to a glass of cider from the jar which had just been brought up from the cellar.

“Where can Louis have got to ?” he murmured.

He was anxious about Louis, his only son. Both his daughters had married years ago outside Rosey, and both his sons-in-law were at the front. But Louis had not yet been called up : the boy was only seventeen, and his favourite child. His mother died in giving birth to him, a premature child, and precipitate he was still.

“Where can Louis be ?”

“Now leave us in peace with your Louis, père

Bugnon," grumbled old Marteau. "You make us reckon wrong, with your Louis . . . that would be vingt-quatre, trente, trente-cinq, Rosse, tu as à payer trente-cinq . . . that would be sept sous, Rosse, sept sous."

Rosse pulled out of his trousers-pocket the leather bag in which he carried about his entire capital in cash; the bag that always accompanied him when he drove into the nearest town to sell his vegetables. Rosse's spinach is famous far and near, and the reason was apparent: he rented Rosey's cesspool, and his spinach profited by it.

Carefully he counted out the seven big coppers on the table, looking hard at each one, as if there were no Boches at his house, as if the war had never been heard of. Rosse loved his native country, but his whole heart was wedded to those hard-earned sous, and Marteau knew how difficult it was for him to part with them.

"Encore un, et encore un," said Marteau. "Vite, vite, Rosse, et encore un. . . ."

At last the final copper lay on the table, and Marteau swept them into his pocket.

It annoyed Rosse that it was Marteau who had won. He would not have minded so much if the hunchback had gained his seven sous; but as for Marteau, who was the richest man in the village, he had enough without that. Only recently he had gained, after an interminable law-suit, a piece of good land that was simply made for spinach, in Rosse's opinion. And now he had won these seven sous. It was true he had got the greatest number of Boches on his farm. He had given his farm the ambitious title of "Clos mon Abri!" Son abri! And there it was full of Boches. A fine shelter! Rosse chuckled to himself,

There was a loud knock at the door of the Café du Raisin. Père Bugnon, who had settled down to a little nap behind the bar, jumped up; the farmers pricked up their ears. Jeanne Loisir, anticipating nothing pleasant, slipped into the kitchen. Only Minette, the pretty grey kitten, retained her composure, purring comfortably on the seat behind the bar.

"Entrez," growled père Bugnon.

"Sales cochons," grunted Rosse.

A gigantic Pomeranian grenadier strode in. He belonged to Berkersburg's battalion, fugleman of the first section of the seventh company; one of the few surviving the fight in the forest of Troyon.

The imposing figure of the grenadier, towering head and shoulders above the old mayor, induced père Bugnon to doff his cap. The soldier handed him a note on which were written two words in French.

"Les armes, bien, les armes," murmured the mayor.

The grenadier saluted and went out.

"Ils viennent?" asked Marteau.

"Ben sûr qu'ils viennent," answered Bugnon.

The farmers threw down their cards. Jeanne came forward to receive payment.

"Bonjour, père Bugnon."

"Bonjour, messieurs." The three crept away.

CHAPTER II

THOU WANDEREST IN THY FANCIES

“Où est Louis ?” père Bugnon asked again.

“Je n’en sais rien,” curtly replied Jeanne. But a sinister smile hovered round her mouth, and a look of something like fatalism lurked in her steadfast eyes.

“Pas de bêtise, bien entendu,” remarked père Bugnon.

“Bien entendu, mon oncle,” responded the girl.

Père Bugnon was not satisfied. He was about to renew his warning, vain though it might be, when the door opened, and major von Berkersburg came in with sergeant Wolf. Von Berkersburg was pale ; his bandaged left arm hung in a sling.

With a short “Bonjour,” to which no answer was returned, he went to the table, ordering sharply :

“Clear the table, mademoiselle.”

Jeanne silently obeyed. Sergeant Wolf looked out of the window at the farmyard, where père Bugnon’s fowls were enjoying themselves on the dung-heap. Under the sergeant’s arm a collection of documents on blue paper indicated the major’s task of organisation at Rosey. Since the entry into the village it was he who was master there.

“Pen and ink,” he commanded.

Jeanne looked at him uncomprehendingly.

He repeated in a peevish tone :

“Une plume et de l’encre, mademoiselle.”

With some delay the girl produced them.

"Sit down, sergeant."

"Right, sir."

Jeanne placed a chair at the table with its back to the window, which, as usual, was closed. Both sat down. As she put the inkstand and pen before the sergeant, she asked mechanically, forgetting for the moment that she was speaking to Boches :

"Du vin, monsieur ?"

"Un quart, mademoiselle," answered von Berkersburg.

"Du rouge ou du blanc ?"

"Du blanc."

Hearing the order, père Bugnon filled a bottle, which Jeanne carried to the two men.

"Help yourself, sergeant."

"At your orders, sir."

"No, not at my orders. For God's sake, drink if you like, or if not leave it alone; but not to order."

"I'll take the liberty, major."

Berkersburg threw a fifty-centime piece at the girl.

Jeanne offered change.

"C'est en ordre," said Berkersburg.

With a "Merci beaucoup," unnoticed by the major, Jeanne softly withdrew.

"Are you in pain, major ?" asked the sergeant sympathetically.

"No, no pain, absolutely no pain, thanks all the same. Had no pain in my arm at all; at least, I can't remember any. I only feel rather stupid. Just a little blood-letting, Wolf, nothing more. It will save me three courses of the waters at Marienbad; you may depend upon that."

He poured a mouthful of wine into his glass.

"Your good health, Wolf. This time, any way, we settled the business."

"Yes, major, we did."

"How is the colonel, sergeant?"

"The staff-surgeon said this morning that the colonel was not yet out of danger."

"H'm, not yet?"

"Bullet in the lung, the staff-surgeon says."

"Have you received the reports of the company leaders?"

"Not the full reports yet, sir, only general statements."

"Well?"

Though he knew that the mayor and his niece could not understand a word of German, Wolf whispered his reply.

"Well?" repeated von Berkersburg, thinking he had misunderstood.

Wolf said it again.

"Eighty per cent. losses, major. Of the eighth company only six men and captain Adolf are left."

Von Berkersburg writhed.

Was it with intention that Wolf particularly mentioned the eighth and Adolf?

The thought gnawed him that it was Adolf who had saved him—Adolf whom he had sent, as he supposed, to his death. Without Adolf's unselfish assistance he must have bled to death.

Only yesterday the surgeon had confirmed it:

"You would have been lost beyond doubt, major, if by the mercy of providence some one had not happened to be near, and stopped the bleeding." And it was this man, this Uriah—but why think of it now?

To thrust the subject from his thoughts, he asked, though he knew it superfluous:

"Have you requested captain Adolf and lieutenant Schlosser to come here to the café? I wish to have everything in order when I take over."

"Yes, major."

"And volunteer Klotz?"

"And volunteer Klotz; he is billeted on this house."

"Very well, sergeant. He speaks French fluently, this Klotz?"

"Yes, sir. He studied eighteen months in Grenoble, and speaks it fluently."

"Good. It is well that he was among the six left. We cannot do without people who speak French."

"Quite so, major, can't be done without," assented the sergeant. Full of gloomy thoughts he stared again into the yard, where the cock, flapping his wings, gave vent to a loud "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

As if he could read the sergeant's thoughts, von Berkersburg inquired:

"What of the other companies and other battalions of the regiment, Wolf? You know I have not heard particulars, being laid up in my quarters."

"Everywhere the same, major, an average loss of eighty per cent.; I do not know any more myself. There has not yet been time to draw up the full reports."

"The important thing is that our left wing succeeded in surrounding the fortress, Wolf."

"Yes, sir, it did that."

"Even if our regiment did nearly go to the devil."

Wolf finished his wine. Von Berkersburg sat musing. He felt weak and wretched. The terrible loss of blood had seriously enfeebled him. But he

tried to rally his forces. He commanded now the remnant of the regiment, and the general had recommended him for the Iron Cross. When he thought of that he could not refrain from a sardonic smile.

What a complex character his was, that he could feel proud of things which he disdained and ought to disdain! Whither had ambition driven him, philosopher by nature, who always looked beneath the surface of things? How did millions in Germany regard these events? As a hurricane sweeping across the earth that had to be endured; or again, as a mission divinely imposed upon the nation of Germany.

But he, with a maimed body which he felt was nearly useless already, could penetrate to the bottom of these events as one observes the pebbles in the depths of a lake through its clear waters, and he could see well that there were no treasures to reward the diver. But by the force of his will he would go on. He would follow the way to the end through whatever prejudices or vain conceits. He would seem still to the world what it supposed him—an enviable, a happy man; even though he, perhaps among thousands who were blind, could recognise the emptiness of the gay-coloured shell, the barren mud below the shining waters of the lake. That was his destiny: to be at once exalted and absurd.

And Melanie? Melanie, who never had been really his, never could be his; Melanie, for whose sake he laid a fresh sin upon his soul—the murder of a friend: a friend who had trusted him and risked his life to save him.

At this moment the entrance of Adolf, accompanied by Schlosser, broke in upon his reverie.

CHAPTER III

NOT TRUTHFUL A WITNESS

"Good morning, Berkersburg," said the captain cheerfully.

"Mornin', Adolf."

"Stand at ease, sergeant."

"Please keep your seat, sergeant. How are you to-day, Berkersburg?"

"Thanks, much better, Adolf, but still a little weak."

"Well, that will improve, old chap."

"We'll hope so."

"May I also inquire how you are, major?"

"Many thanks, my dear Schlosser. Please sit down."

Adolf sat down in the chair by the window.

"Now tell volunteer Klotz to come down, then we can begin immediately," said Berkersburg to the sergeant.

"Right, sir."

Wolf went out.

"Horrible air in this room," remarked Adolf. "If you gentlemen don't object, I'll open the window."

"Yes, it is a terrible smell, my boy. These peasants never air a room. Open it by all means, if you don't mind the draught to your back."

"On the contrary, I am always glad of fresh air."

Adolf opened the window, and resumed his seat. Softly as a cat Jeanne came up to the table.

"Et vous, messieurs?" she said in a low voice to Adolf and Schlosser.

"Du vin rouge."

"Bien, messieurs."

While Jeanne waited for the bottles to be filled by père Bugnon, Adolf said anxiously to von Berkersburg:

"You ought to have obeyed the surgeon, and asked for leave. Going home would have been the right thing for you."

With a sad smile Berkersburg returned:

"Going home, Adolf? . . . But you know that I have no longer a home, since she is at Falkenstein."

He looked into vacancy, sadly musing. Suddenly he wrung Adolf's hand, giving vent to his sentiments.

"I'll never forget it, Adolf: do you hear? Never."

"But Berkersburg, it was a matter of course," replied Adolf, surprised.

"A matter of course to rush away from the firing-line to save one wounded man, where dozens were falling? Is that a matter of course?"

"For me, yes: because this wounded man happens to be the commander of the battalion."

"Was that the only reason, Adolf?"

Adolf's answer seemed to choke him.

"The only reason."

"Well then, of course. . . ."

Berkersburg smiled. He knew that Adolf supposed him to believe that the captain was saving his friend, not his major.

During this conversation Schlosser was discreetly inspecting some prints on the wall of the

room which represented types of the French army. He whistled softly, he did not quite know why :

“I had a gallant comrade,
No better e'er was tried.”

Sergeant Wolf had returned with Klotz. Now that there was a pause in the conversation volunteer Klotz came forward to report himself :

“Volunteer Klotz of the eighth company as interpreter.”

“You speak French fluently, volunteer ? ”

“I think so, major.”

“All right.”

“Sit down, please, gentlemen. Sergeant Wolf, write the minutes.”

“Right, sir.”

“Volunteer Klotz, tell the man behind the bar to come forward and stand at the table here.”

Père Bugnon sullenly obeyed the order, repeated in French by Klotz.

“Ask the man his name, all Christian names and the surname, and whether he is mayor of Rosey.”

To Klotz's questions père Bugnon replied :

“Marie Josèphe Pierre Bugnon, né le 18 Juin, 1853, maire de Rosey.”

“Is he married ? ”

“Veuf, monsieur.”

Bugnon fidgeted, with his hands in his trousers pockets. He felt that this annoyed the “Prusien,” and consequently it gave him particular pleasure to do it. Berkersburg forced himself to ignore the mayor's behaviour. He went on registering the personal details concerning père Bugnon : Had he any children, sons or daughters, how many,

were the children unmarried, their ages, were they living in Rosey ?

The mayor, who himself had drawn up dozens of registration forms, replied to Klotz's interpretation with rigid accuracy and official conciseness :

"Three children, two daughters, one son, 28, 23, and 16 years old. Daughters married outside Rosey ; son living here."

"Who is the young girl who serves here in the café ? "

"Jeanne Loisir, my niece, monsieur."

"Is there a curé at Rosey ? "

"There is a curé—Jean Bonvisage."

"Where does the curé live ? "

"In the vicarage, close to the church."

"Who is the richest landed proprietor of Rosey ? "

"Aristide Marteau."

"Does he live far off ? "

"Exactly opposite the Café du Raisin."

"Very good."

Père Bugnon smiled a contemptuous smile at the mayor's unnecessary questions.

Berkersburg remained cool ; he did not mind the smile, only saying to sergeant Wolf :

"Give volunteer Klotz my orders of the day to be posted up in Rosey, and tell him to translate the order for the mayor."

Volunteer Klotz read out in French :

"TO THE INHABITANTS OF ROSEY :

"The inhabitants of Rosey are forbidden under penalty of death :

"To have any weapons in their possession ;

"To remain in the streets after dusk ;

"To close the shutters of their windows ;

"To assume any hostile attitude towards the troops of his Majesty the King of Prussia."

"Did you understand that, Monsieur le Maire of Rosey ?"

"Parfaitement, monsieur."

"And did you attend to the order which I sent you this morning ?"

Upon the translation of this the mayor inquired :

"Quel ordre entendez-vous, monsieur ?"

"The order about the arms."

"The arms are in the barn."

"In what barn ?"

"In the one next to the mairie."

"All arms ?"

Berkersburg strongly emphasised on the word "all."

The maire repeated solemnly :

"All arms, sir."

"I make you personally responsible, under penalty of death, mayor of Rosey, for having all arms collected and placed in the barn."

"Parfaitement, monsieur."

"Very well, volunteer Klotz, tell the mayor that I shall be compelled to keep him, the curé, and farmer, what's his name ?"

"Aristide Marteau, major."

"And the farmer, Aristide Marteau, as hostages, and detain them in the church, so that no infringement may take place on the part of the population of my order of the day."

Volunteer Klotz interpreted.

At the word "otages" a bitter smile curled père Bugnon's lips.

"If monsieur thinks . . ." he began, but fell silent, shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, I do think it, mayor of Rosey.

"Sergeant Wolf! Go to the guard in the engine-house, get there two men, and bring the curé and farmer Aristide Marteau here."

"Right, sir."

Sergeant Wolf and volunteer Klotz left the café.

"You will be good enough, lieutenant, to check the arms in the barn again."

"Right, sir."

"Have you got the key, mayor?"

"Je ne comprends pas."

"La clef, la clef de la grange."

"Parfaitement, monsieur."

Père Bugnon shuffled slowly behind the bar to get the key, which hung there on a nail in the wall.

"Then, en avant, mon ami."

The words came from lieutenant Schlosser, who pointed to the door.

Père Bugnon sized up the Prussian with a contemptuous look and followed him in silence. Like her cousin Louis, who had been missing all the morning, Jeanne had silently vanished.

Berkersburg and Adolf were left alone.

CHAPTER IV

MIST SHROUDED IN WILD CLOUDS

MORE than half an hour elapsed before sergeant Wolf and Klotz returned with the curé and farmer Marteau. During this time Berkersburg and Adolf had exchanged only commonplaces. Yet it would have been a favourable opportunity to speak out. But whenever the former tried to express his gratitude, Adolf managed to put him off, and Berkersburg could not but feel that his friend had suspected his murderous intent. An unfathomable gulf yawned between them which they tried in vain to bridge by conventional phrases. Both breathed more freely when the group of men entered.

"Sergeant Wolf and volunteer Klotz of the eighth company, with curé Bonvisage and farmer Marteau," reported the sergeant.

His pronounciation of the name Bonvisage had caused laughter in all Rosey, but here it produced no effect.

"Let us wait," decided the major, "until lieutenant Schlosser and the mayor of Rosey return."

"Right, sir."

Berkersburg and Adolf sat down again at the table. The others remained at the door.

"You may sit down, gentlemen," said Berkersburg to the curé and the farmer.

No answer.

"Asseyez-vous."

The sullen farmer sat down on a bench by the wall of the café; he clearly hated the whole situation. Berkersburg took the occasion to examine his men a little more closely. He looked at them with the eyes of an officer who considered himself no mean judge of human nature.

"Nothing good can be expected here," he concluded.

The farmer made an impression of mere stubbornness; but a Prussian major soon settles people of that sort. For his soldiers, he has in such cases the simple expedient of jail, and for that fellow some cellar in Rosey. . . . But the curé. . . . As yet the tall, lean man, with silvery hair, marked by the tonsure, had not uttered a sound. Berkersburg understood him thoroughly all the same.

The beautiful words of peace and tolerance must surely flow from these lips, accustomed to the preaching of charity. But something gleamed in those saint-like eyes that Berkersburg had been taught to recognise by his experiences in Alsace-Lorraine. Berkersburg, the son of North-east Prussia, could well define that look.

It gave warning of the fanaticism of the Catholic Chauvinist, to whose mind these Prussians had not only brutally invaded his native country, but also outraged the sanctity of the One Holy Church. In the curé's eyes they were not only robbers and murderers; for such the Church had forgiveness at the last: they were above all heretics and misbelievers, over whose doom in the infernal fire Heaven itself rejoiced. Something of the sombre

spirit of Philip II, who kindled one *auto-da-fé* after the other in defence of the Faith, lived in the soul of this simple curé of Rosey.

It was necessary to be cautious with him, notwithstanding the gentle smile on the thin lips, the venerable and nobly shaped head, so different from the farmer's. In dealing with him one might be standing on a volcano; a sea of fire might be heaving under the smiling verdure.

Schlosser now returned with the mayor.

"Is everything in order, lieutenant?" asked Berkersburg.

"Yes, sir, the mayor has assured me, on his word of honour, that all arms have been deposited in the barn of the mairie."

"And have you once more pointed out to the mayor that he stakes his life on the accuracy of this statement, lieutenant?"

"I have done so, sir."

"And to the two other hostages, curé Bonvisage and farmer Marteau?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you receive the impression, lieutenant, that what you saw were all the arms available in Rosey?"

"The arms are very old, major, most of them no longer of any use; as far as numbers go, they might quite well be all."

The lieutenant's tone was dubious.

Berkersburg addressed the mayor himself:

"Are these really all the arms in Rosey, those in the barn of the mairie?"

The mayor hesitated a moment before answering.

"Interpret, volunteer Klotz."

"Ce sont en vérité toutes les armes se trouvant à Rosey, qui ont été déposées dans la grange de la mairie?"

In a clear and firm voice the mayor replied :

“ Toutes les armes de Rosey, monsieur.”

“ Very good.”

On a gesture from the major the curé and Marteau rose, and with the mayor came to the table.

Klotz translating, Berkersburg spoke to the curé :

“ I draw your attention to the fact, monsieur le curé, that I am compelled to detain as hostages, and to confine in the church, the mayor of Rosey, Pierre Bugnon, farmer Aristide Marteau, and yourself, curé Bonvisage . . .”

At these words the curé made an involuntary movement of protest ; the thought of sacrilege came to his mind, and to his face an unmistakable expression of profound contempt. Unconcernedly Berkersburg continued :

“ . . . in order to secure the safety of the inhabitants of Rosey and the freedom from injury of the troops of his Majesty the King of Prussia, and these three hostages will answer with their lives for any act of resistance. You will have the kindness, monsieur le curé, to go through the whole village with the two hostages, accompanied by a drummer, and yourself point out to the population the inevitable consequences of any thoughtlessness. Any resistance to the troops of his Majesty the King, who according to international law has taken possession of Rosey, will be punished inexorably by the death of the three hostages, and, should I deem it necessary, by the destruction of Rosey.”

“ You understand me, mayor ? ” Berkersburg asked incisively once more when volunteer Klotz had interpreted.

“ Parfaitement, monsieur.”

"Then, sergeant, go with the three hostages to the guard, call for a drummer, and make the round of the whole village."

"Right, sir."

The sergeant got up. His efforts to make the three hostages march off in military order met with passive resistance from the curé, the mayor, and Marteau. So the good Wolf could only utter smartly his command "March" and follow his peculiar column, who went out of the café before him without a word.

Berkersburg turned to the volunteer.

"You may now go, Klotz."

"Right, sir."

"Tell me, you are billeted here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Stay for another half-hour in your room, volunteer, in case I should want you again."

"Right, sir."

Klotz disappeared with a smart right about face. Schlosser rose.

"You do not want me any more, major?"

"No, thanks, lieutenant, until this afternoon."

"Until this afternoon, major."

Once more Berkersburg and Adolf were alone.

"I do not like the look of these chaps. I feel rather anxious about it all, Adolf," began Berkersburg.

"Why anxious? You are not easily apprehensive."

"It looks like it, Adolf. I admit it looks like it."

"Only looks like it, you say."

Looking intently at Adolf, and laying a curious stress on every word, the major asked:

"Do you then really believe that one is what one seems to be?"

Adolf, in astonishment, replied in his straightforward way :

"I believe it of you, Berkersburg."

"No, no, old fellow, you do not really believe that: you never believed it."

And, as Adolf tried to repeat his assertion, Berkersburg burst out laughing.

"I would take it as a downright insult, Adolf, if any one really supposed I was what I seem, and am obliged to seem. If I had ever been like that the events of this war would have taught me differently, and that it was more than time to become another man."

"I don't understand you."

"That is all right, Adolf; it is all the better that you should not. Unfortunately, I can't make things clear to you, and explain that I see through things here just as I saw through them at home. We are acting a play, my dear fellow, that may grow into the greatest tragedy in the history of the world. But——"

"But what?"

"Ought we to philosophise about it? No, no. They called you bullet-proof; yet I doubt whether you and I will live to see the fifth act of this tragedy. 'Only error is life; knowledge is death.'"

"So you indulge in Schiller, Berkersburg?"

"Even so. . . . Happened to read it in this rag to-day."

Berkersburg pulled out of his pocket a page of a Berlin newspaper. . . . "There. . . ."

"What do you want with it?"

"It is a play that brings tears to one's eyes and at the same time tickles one's ribs to laughter. How they do lie in those things! We have not the slightest idea of it, my friend, we who are bled to

death here; after all, not the faintest idea. . . . Do you remember, Adolf?"

"What, Berkersburg?"

"Our talks at home, in the Casino, at the dining-table, in the smoke-room? Do you remember our talks three or four years ago in the small hours of the morning, when we discussed this war as an unavoidable necessity, for which we all were longing more or less? When we joked about collective graves in France and steppes full of icy snow in Russia, in a tone as if it were all a silly farce in which Harlequin scatters about pig's blood from a bladder—and not our own life-blood? At that time, don't you remember, my boy, we were in such a frame of mind that it did not matter whether Morocco or Scutari was the object, any cause was sufficient? And to-day——"

"Well, and to-day?"

"Now we have forgotten all that. What shall I say about to-day? Read this rag, then you'll have enough, and only we, only we know the truth. We know it . . . megalomania, old chap, megalomania, that wants to pile Ossa on Pelion."

Adolf gazed stupefied at von Berkersburg. He had never spoken like that before. Why should he say such things now? Adolf took the newspaper and began to read the article, which Berkersburg had marked heavily with blue pencil under its title: "The Double Dealing of the Entente Powers. Our Enemies' Tissue of Lies."

Von Berkersburg looked at it over his shoulder, laughing heartily.

"What's the matter, Berkersburg?"

"Nothing, nothing, nothing. . . . 'For O, for O, the hobby-horse is forgot!' So says Hamlet. And this apostle of truth came from perfidious

Albion . . . to us . . . this child, no angel is so pure . . . ha, ha, ha. . . .”

The drummer’s roll from the street broke in upon his tirade: the hostages were being led through the village. They could hear the curé’s admonishing voice, imploring the people of Rosey to remain calm and not to imperil the lives of the hostages by any outbreak. What did they care about those three lives if they could revenge themselves on the Boches? In a confused clamour rose the curses of the men, the shrill cries of the women, the broken muttering of the aged, long since kissed by Death, tottering on their sticks, as if to-day were *Mi-carême*; as if the procession of the hostages were a masquerade for the benefit of Rosey.

Passing the *mairie*, they turned into the village street. There was another halt, and again the curé’s smooth voice addressed the people. Who could expect such turbulent waters to be made calm by a cruse of oil? thought Berkersburg, looking at Adolf with an expression of pity.

CHAPTER V

A FIERCE TEMPEST

AT this moment occurred that which sealed the fate of Rosey. At the window, half-concealed by the autumn-tinted leafage of the creepers, glittered the barrel of a rifle. Behind it appeared the pale, menacing face of young Louis Bugnon. Adolf and Berkersburg, their backs to the window, perceived nothing. Suddenly a shot, in that confined place like the crack of thunder, stunned their ears. It was a signal. As if by command, it was answered by a volley from all the houses of the village. Only the old and useless arms lay in the barn of the mairie; the serviceable ones were now in the hands of the enraged people of Rosey.

Berkersburg's head swam, and an icy sweat poured down his face. He seemed to be upon the point of falling into depths of blackness, for the weakness caused by the loss of blood was not yet conquered. He staggered, caught at the table, and dragged himself up. His brain cleared; frightful realisation took hold of his mind: he could see again. He saw.

At his feet, soaked in blood, silent and still, his mouth open slightly as if he were about to speak, but dumb for ever, lay captain Adolf.

At one stroke the son of the mayor of Rosey had laid low the Arch-enemy who had invaded his

home and his village. Outside, the crackle of rifles went on, shot after shot mingled with yells of triumph and howls of execration from the maddened villagers. In the streets of Rosey the conflict grew.

Berkersburg threw himself on the floor.

"Adolf, Adolf," he adjured, his lips trembling. "Say one word. Adolf, are you so badly hit?"

But in the already glazing eyes of Adolf, Berkersburg saw nothing but mute and pulseless death. His friend was gone; gone in a moment; without accepting his thanks, without giving him an opportunity for atonement: the friend whose cowardly and base murder he had tried to achieve.

Berkersburg was overpowered by fury.

"Revenge! Revenge! Revenge!" he snarled inaudibly, like a wild beast. . . .

The silence of death reigned in the café, but outside the uproar increased; the fusillade of rifles was at last answered by the infantry. In his frenzy Berkersburg shook the dead body of his friend, though bitterly conscious that all was in vain.

"Get up, Adolf, get up! Speak one word, only one word. Are you so badly hit?"

"What shall I do?" he cried involuntarily.

"What shall I do?" His raging mind answered:

"Revenge! Revenge! Revenge!"

The door of the café was dashed open, and lieutenant Schlosser's pale face appeared.

"You, Schlosser?"

"Hasn't there been shooting here too?"

"As you see, yes."

With a trembling hand Berkersburg pointed to Adolf's corpse.

"Dead?"

"Dead."

"The curs! Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing can be done. Through the back from the window. These curs, these curs!"

Berkersburg clenched his fists.

"Don't you think, major, that the surgeon?—"

"See for yourself, Schlosser. Through the back, right through the heart and lung: nothing to be done. Struck down as if by lightning; like an oak-tree in a thunderstorm. The curs! the curs!"

"Have they caught the beast?"

"No, but he shall be found!"

The clamour in the streets redoubled. The noise of firing increased in volume, mingled with the shrieks of women and children, whom the infuriated soldiers were dragging through the mud of the gutters by their dishevelled hair. One agonised scream rent the air. It came from a woman who had been run through by the bayonet of a soldier.

"They are pouring boiling water and burning paraffin from the windows, major."

Foam lay on Schlosser's lips as he uttered the words.

"They must find the murderer! They shall find him!" vociferated Berkersburg, beside himself with fury. "They must bring me his murderer alive. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

Volley succeeded volley in the street. The infantry seemed at last to have been able to combine, and the sergeants appeared to be masters of the situation. For outside was heard: "Take aim, fire! take aim, fire!" Followed the crack of the rifles, yells of anger, piercing cries, scornful

laughter, the sound of wooden shoes stumbling on the village pavement ; and again : " Take aim, fire ! "

" Let the hostages be locked up, Schlosser. I make you responsible for them," thundered Berkersburg.

" Right, sir."

Schlosser went out to execute the order and left Berkersburg standing before his friend's corpse, stunned, unable to think or to act.

" Adolf, Adolf, Adolf."

He seemed to be suffocating. The tears which before he had not been able to shed forced themselves burning into his eyes, so that he could no longer distinguish the objects in the room. For some moments he was paralysed. He felt himself to be standing on the edge of a crater, watching the fiery tide rising to engulf all around, unable to move in any direction. Adolf, whom the enemy's fire had spared among hundreds to be murdered here, assassinated from behind. Yes, it was murder—cowardly, base murder, notwithstanding everything he had thought and said during these days ; murder, that called for the ultimate penalty. Here was an oath forsworn, a broken word : all arms . . .

Again a terrible smile distorted Berkersburg's features. False oaths, words of honour broken, treaties torn up like scraps of paper, were they not the order of the day in this war ? No one was guiltless, no one, here or there ; not these of Rosey ; those others far less so. Might was trampling down right ; necessity recognising no law, no morality, no justice ; chaos fighting chaos. Revenge for Adolf, revenge for his friend, without looking to the right or the left : this was his task

now, his only mission. God send it might be his last. His sword, which unthinkingly he had taken off some time before, he now fastened on ; drew his revolver and cocked it.

“ On Berkersburg, on to the task of revenge ! ”

Was it God, was it some devil, or his own over-excited mind that whispered the words ? He knew not.

“ On, Berkersburg, on to avenge the dead ! ”

He went out into the street a fiend-possessed man, the demon of Rosey's destruction. His ears were greeted by the sound of his infantry's fusillade.

“ On, Berkersburg, on ! ”

The village was heaped with corpses : he hardly noticed them. Careless of the bullets of his own men, which might have reached him, he clambered across the bodies of peasants and soldiers alike, and ran on, drawn sword in one hand, revolver in the other.

A woman approached him, carrying a jug containing a clear liquid. Was it vitriol ? He lifted his revolver and fired. The woman fell dead, the limpid stream from the jug mingling with her blood. He strode across her body and ran on. From every window gleamed rifle-barrels.

“ Wolf ! ” cried Berkersburg. “ Sergeant Wolf ! ”

Like the roar of a lion the one word “ Wolf ! ” pealed through the streets of Rosey, as if one beast of prey were hounding on another to the work of destruction.

As if by a miracle he passed unscathed before the windows from which bullets were hurtling ; escaped the volleys of his own soldiers ; avoided the flails and cudgels in the hands of women and men, whose weak arms, galvanised by hatred, confusedly rained down strokes on friend and foe.

“ Wolf, Wolf, Wolf ! ”

From a distance answered the sergeant's voice at last.

“ Major ! ”

Berkersburg ran towards the sound. He found the sergeant under the cover of a wall. Taking out a loose brick, he had extemporised a loop-hole through which he fired shot after shot on the frantic peasants. Every shot found its mark. Berkersburg ran up to him, panting :

“ You have incendiary bombs, Wolf ? ”

“ Yes, major.”

“ Take thirty men, and set fire to every house in this cursed hole. I will not have one stone left on another.”

“ Right, sir.”

The sergeant leapt up, his eyes sparkling. He hurried off, not thinking of taking cover, ignoring the bullets whistling round his ears like hail.

He was already a long way off when suddenly a strange, inarticulate sound broke from Berkersburg, as a frightful pang darted like a flame through his back. He, too, from behind. With his remaining strength he fired his revolver. The peasant who had run him through with a dung-fork fell, streaming with blood. This was the last sight on which his eyes rested before his senses left him. The peasant's dung-fork had torn a ghastly wound in his back, and one of the steel points was firmly imbedded in the spine. He lay there hour after hour, paralysed, but fortunately unconscious.

CHAPTER VI

WITH A FURY AND A RUSH

MORE than three hours lasted the fight in the streets of Rosey between the infuriated peasants and the handful of soldiers, who were all that remained of the decimated second battalion. Only after the third battalion had been called up from the nearest village, "Les Feuilles," did the Boches succeed in overpowering the maddened crowd.

With flails and clubs, with dung-forks and cart-poles they beat down the soldiers, thus efficiently assisting the fire from fowling-pieces and cavalry pistols, kept back from the store deposited in the barn of the mairie.

After the disappearance of Berkersburg, who had not yet been found, lieutenant Schlosser took command. Schlosser, the would-be poet and professor of history, was made to recognise himself. A few hours had changed him also into a frenzied beast, no longer master of its passions. He became like all the others; he could see, hear, smell nothing but the acrid scent of blood, the searing glare of flames.

The glare of flames! Like thunderbolts fell the masses of flame into the little cots and the barns of Rosey, just filled with the joyfully gathered harvest. Wherever an incendiary bomb fell the tongues of fire shot up into the darkening sky.

Suddenly chimed out the bell of Rosey from the small spire.

The curé's acolyte had hidden himself behind the high altar, under the picture of the sorrowing Mother of our Lord. It was he who was pulling the bell-rope. The plaintive notes sounded far over the silver river, echoed up the dim slopes of the hills, and rose pleadingly into the silent heavens.

In the small churchyard stood Schlosser. And the man who thought himself a poet realised fully the whole splendour of the terrible picture before him.

Vengeance on Rosey! the fall of Iliou was repeated in this hamlet of a few hundred inhabitants, because a boy only sixteen had shot at a captain through the window of a café, thereby giving the signal for the general attack.

And yet—what was it Berkersburg had said when in the forest-clearing he had unburdened his hitherto fast-shut soul, when, facing the death they all expected, they two had discussed "Don Carlos."

Vengeance on Rosey! Verses from the "Iliad" rose to Schlosser's mind, verses which Nero perhaps recited on the Palatine hill, when Rome was burning at his feet.

Masses of flame burst from the cottages and farms, beams broke and crashed down, the roar of destruction rose about him, who had become a devil of overthrow against his own will. Listening to the blast of ruin he stood in the little churchyard, where the flowers of autumn decorated the graves of those who rested in peace; who were laid down in the shelter of the church, under the symbol of God's mercy, because the village, that to-morrow would have ceased to exist, was once their home; the hallowed spot where they lay,

the haven to which their eyes had turned at the end of their long and weary pilgrimage. If any had escaped poverty, it was by labour and industry.

Schlosser mechanically read the French words on one of the tombstones at his feet, and gazed with parching eyes into the flames of the harvest of Rosey. The little store gathered with sweating brows and toil-worn hands by the hard endeavour of hundreds of laborious and peaceful men was burning to ashes.

Vengeance on Rosey ! The procession of exiles tottered past before Schlosser's eyes. Children and girls, women and aged men, staggered along clasping the miserable remnants of their homes. There a little creature of six strained her linnet's cage in her trembling little arms ; here a tiny boy of five tenderly pressed to his heart his kitten, saved from the flames of his father's cottage ; a blind octogenarian groped for the paving-stones with his stick ; a cripple of twenty, lame in both legs, nearly falling from his crutches, dragged himself painfully over the bloody mire. All were fleeing, all were now waifs and strays, to lie through the terrible night in the bare fields under the arching sky and the far-off stars. Endless seemed the procession of misery, making its way past the heaped-up dead through the burning and ruined village street ; endless, and yet there were but some hundreds.

It was quite dark. But the torches of soldiers and the glare of blazing homes lighted up that Via Dolorosa as if it were full day. Nothing was spared the man with the poet's mind standing in the flower-grown churchyard. The pageant of agony passed by : mothers with babe at breast,

the terrified elder children holding hand or skirt, huddling close like frightened chickens ; grandmothers, their withered arms wearily carrying a weeping grandchild, trying to soothe it with tearful kisses ; patients, scarcely able to crawl, dragging behind them through the ruins their mattress, their last hope ; women in the last stage of pregnancy—Schlosser counted two, three, four, five. . . . He told himself he would count no more, yet he could not forbear. Where would they bring forth into misery the hapless offspring ? Perhaps nearly dead with grief and horror this very night, in a rut in a field, like a timorous chased hare. God, my God ! . . . and no manger outside the gates of Bethlehem in which they might lay the fruit of their body, as a woman once did who brought into the world the Bearer of the Cross for all mankind.

Endless toiled the procession into the night. Pictures that he had seen in Pisa, in Venice, in Rome recalled themselves to Schlosser's mind. What were they to the panorama that unrolled itself before him now ? Before that sight Dante and Homer would have been dumb, Titian's brush would have fallen from his hand.

Vengeance on Rosey : a vengeance unchained by himself. Like Prometheus who stole the spark, Schlosser raised his clenched fist against those above, who allowed this thing to happen, "the Sleepers," as Goethe called them.

The pealing of the church-bell abruptly ceased. That blood-red gleam on the church-spire, was it a reflection from the blazing barn close by ?

The acolyte heard an ominous crackling from the worm-eaten beams above him. He fled in his white and scarlet vestments, holding in his hands the silver vessel. The wind was rising, a shower

of sparks, blown across the churchyard fell around Schlosser, who, unheeding, still stood there as if spell-bound. A whirl of startled pigeons rose from the nests that they had built in the church-tower, under the shelter of the Cross that saves the world. Driven by the flames that now burst from the spire, they circled round the churchyard; driven by the irresistible mother-love in their panting breasts, they strove back to the nests where their young ones helplessly cried. Their wings beating in the flames, they fell, scorched and burning, at Schlosser's feet, looking at him with imploring eyes as they writhed.

Vengeance on the innocent animals of Rosey! Schlosser suddenly remembered. It was too late. . . .

"Open the stables, unfasten the cows and horses, let out the pigs and sheep," he shouted in despair to one of the soldiers running past.

The man did not hear. He was carrying in his hands a last incendiary bomb. As if driven by the Furies, he was seeking a last mark.

Schlosser was powerless. The Furies he had invoked were raging to the consummation of desolation. Women and children, the aged and the babe, the sick, the maimed, the unborn, the helpless beasts and birds, the frightful holocaust spared nothing. And among it all stood its author, the would-be poet, he who had brought it about in the blind execution of an order from his superior—the man who was an insoluble riddle.

By him vengeance—such vengeance—had been let loose on Rosey. The whole sky was the colour of blood, mingled with streaks of sulphurous yellow, which signalised the destruction of the piles of straw and the stores of corn and hay. Sodom and

Gomorrha, thought Schlosser. But those, according to the judgment of Jahve, had deserved their fate. Had Rosey?

The flames and the rolling clouds of smoke had hidden the serene stars; the whole horizon was a lurid pall; Rosey was one blaze. Schlosser covered his aching eyes with his hands. They were wet with tears. Standing on the pile of death, heaped up by his orders, he wept for Rosey—and for himself.

“Verily I say unto you, there is one among you who will betray Me.”

One who would be a poet, and who yet did this!

There was a thunderous crash. The church-tower fell into ruin before Schlosser’s eyes. The image of the Mother of God, the merciful Mother with the sword through Her heart, lay beneath a heap of ashes.

The procession of the homeless became thinner and thinner; only solitary stragglers crawled along, the rear-guard of the exiles of Rosey. It was consummated. Adolf’s funeral pile was burnt out; the glow on the horizon paled; Schlosser’s nerves gave way altogether. He broke down and sobbed.

CHAPTER VII

THE DOLEFUL

AMONG the deserted and still smoking ruins of Rosey there sounded a muffled roll of drums.

Young Louis Bugnon had been discovered, and with the curé Bonvisage, had been seized, brought before a court-martial and condemned to be shot. The mayor and Marteau, the major's other two hostages, had fallen fighting in the streets, where they lay among the still unburied dead.

No one had ventured to approach the devastated village. Not a spectator was to be seen as the firing-squad, preceded by a drummer and led by a sergeant of the sixth company, took up its station in the glory of the new-risen day.

The boy and the old man stood still, pinioned and helpless. They were deadly pale, but on their faces, set with the sombre obstinacy of fanaticism, dwelt something of an uplifted look, something of the exultation of martyrdom.

"If Berkersburg had seen this," thought Schlosser. According to service regulations he must attend the execution as judge at the court-martial. What was it his major had said in the forest of Troyon? What were those rash opinions the missing man had expressed? He had called "franc-tireur" an ill word for a hero of liberty,

prepared to die for a cause which he held to be righteous.

“Squad, halt !”

The firing-party had reached the churchyard and halted close to the graves where the happier dead of Rosey slept peacefully under their flowers.

Sergeant Heinrich arranged his men. A young man of twenty-six, he had enlisted only a short time ago, when the rank and file of the army did not dream of so imminent an outbreak of war. His Theresa, whom he married immediately after enlistment, had been parlour-maid at the house of his captain, where the sergeant, as clerk to the company, had the opportunity of making her acquaintance.

Heinrich was a peace-loving man. The rough work of war never suited him, the son of a subordinate official of the municipality in a little town on the Weser. From his fourteenth year he had been apprenticed to a merchant. He was smart and intelligent, but well-paid posts are difficult to obtain nowadays. When he was called up, therefore, he had yielded to the persuasion of his captain and had remained in the army, thus creating a claim to a civil post. He had no thought of war, and he wished to marry. The necessary consent being obtained in April, he and Theresa were married and settled down in the barracks.

And now ! In the company offices at his clerical work day after day, he had nearly forgotten even how to charge a rifle. And now he was ordered to perform this execution. Sergeant Heinrich of the sixth company, whom nearly all his subordinates chaffed about his quiet manners and his love of peace—he, as executioner, was such an irony of fate as only war can produce.

As he gave orders to his men his thoughts flew to Theresa. When he left her to go to the front it had been confided to him that at Christmas Theresa would present him with the most beautiful gift in the world. But in these terrible days who could know what might happen before Christmas? The boy and the old man who were standing with pinioned arms against the church-yard wall, could they have dreamed two weeks, two days ago, how and why they would be standing there to-day?

And he?

The men were in their places. Schlosser drew a document from his pocket and read the court-martial: "In the name of his Majesty the King of Prussia, in accordance with martial law. . . ." No audience except the soldiers, who, well accustomed to the articles heard a hundred times, took the sentence of death as a matter of course.

In the name of his Majesty, the King of Prussia, who now administered justice through this lieutenant, in the centre of Rosey, destroyed by fire, in the heart of France!

Sergeant Heinrich closed his eyes. The brilliance of the sun, shining through the weeping willows in the churchyard, seemed to blind him. The willows were still green and luxuriant. Who could tell how it would be with them, with him and his company at Christmas? How would it be with Theresa? When the trees had shed their leaves, what else might not have been shed?

The reading of the sentence was ended. Schlosser made a sign to the sergeant to give orders for covering the eyes of the condemned. Sergeant Heinrich thought with horror of his school-days when, on his way past the municipal slaughter-house, he used to see the eyes of the cattle tied

up before they entered the hall that steamed with blood.

Two soldiers went up to the prisoners. They were powerless to move, their hands bound behind them, and cannon-balls attached to their feet. The boy shook his head. "Non, non, non, je ne veux pas ! Laisser mes yeux, non, je ne veux pas." The old curé looked up into the blue sky as if he were praying "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." From his withered lips also, in the same firm tone, came the same words, "Non, non, non, je ne veux pas ! Laisser mes yeux." Both soldiers stood undecided, looking first at the sergeant, then at Schlosser, inquiring, waiting. Curé Bonvisage continued, it was evident, to pray, though unable now to fold his hands, as he used so often in the little church, before the picture of the merciful Mother of God.

Schlosser turned away his face. He could not get Berkersburg's ideas out of his mind. He thought of Andreas Hofer: "At Mantua in fetters." . . . And then again, "You say it ; I am a King." He could no longer bear the sight of the boy doomed to die, of the priest submitting to his fate, as they stood calmly before the instruments of their death ; for the boy and the priest were about to testify by shedding their blood, as did He who stood before the tribunal of Pilate.

"You say it ; I am a King."

True to the oath he had sworn on the flag, he must ask no question, make no examination, simply do his duty ; that was all. The would-be poet summoned up all his self-control :

"Just as they like, sergeant. Give the command to fire."

"Right, sir."

The long roll of the drum reverberated on the shuddering air.

Sergeant Heinrich collected his thoughts and pulled himself together.

"Attention, shoulder arms, take aim. Fire."

The volley rang out.

"Take aim, fire."

The second volley.

"Take aim. Fire."

The third.

"Down arms. At ease."

"Private Bottcher and private Graw."

The soldiers stepped out of the line. Taking the piece of sackcloth from the ground, they covered with it the two warm and bleeding corpses.

"Private Schuenemann, private Boellinger; ordered to dig the graves."

The men immediately began their work.

"Squad, march."

Drummer in front, the squad marched back as it came through the ruins of Rosey, from which the smoke was still ascending to heaven like the fumes of a sacrifice.

Schlosser followed, lost in thought.)

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT GOOD WILL IT DO ?

MANY hours after, the hyenas of the battle-field, exploring the ruins of Rosey, found Berkersburg. He lay by the dunghill of the farm, on the spot where the fork of the peasant pierced him; its point was fast in his spine. Robbing him of his watch and his money, pulling off his rings, which, luckily for him, were very loose, they left him.

The yelping of a starved dog which had lost its master at last guided a patrol to the helpless man. Privates and sergeants gazed terrified at the supposed corpse. The leader, who had gone through a course of first aid, put his ear to the major's chest. He was not mistaken; though scarcely audible, there was respiration, and the heart throbbed faintly, though only perceptible to a trained ear.

At a hint from the sergeant, two privates raised the major. With a dull sound the fork that had wounded him fell to the ground, leaving the broken point in the body. Berkersburg remained unconscious, and knew nothing while he was taken by the ambulance-bearers to the nearest field hospital. After making a thorough examination the surgeon shook his head.

"Absolutely hopeless. The spinal marrow is pierced; but we might try an operation, nurse Ruth,"

Nurse Ruth made no answer. Hundreds were waiting in the hospital to have their wounds dressed and to be operated upon. The battle of Troyon had been resumed, and the procession of wagons and motor-cars carrying victims of the conflict seemed never-ending.

"Anyway, we will try, nurse Ruth," repeated the surgeon.

"Just as you think, doctor."

Berkersburg lay face downward on the kitchen-table, procured from some farm, that served for operations.

"We have no beds left ! Outside in the meadows the wounded men are lying in rows."

Nurse Ruth opened the door to convince the surgeon of the truth of her words. A frightful gust of sighs and groans from the badly wounded came into the room. Surgeon and nurse were accustomed to that now. Nothing, however terrible, could shake their nerves any longer.

"Kill me, make an end of me," rose the horrible petitions. Those who could cry out had the greatest chance of recovery. The dangerously wounded made no sound ; they lay like corpses, knowing nothing that went on around them.

The surgeon orders that the assistant should deal with the transport.

"He is already outside," replied the nurse.

"All right, I will not leave anything untried in this case."

"Just as you think ; but we have no bed free."

"Bed No. 18 will become free, nurse ; the man is dying."

"But he is not dead yet."

"Do what you are told, nurse ; before I have finished the man will be dead."

"Very well."

"Give me the mask and the chloroform."

She took them from the kitchen-cupboard, which the surgeon had fitted up for his instruments and material. Again she demurred. The major's hopeless condition seemed not much to impress her.

"We must economise in chloroform," she suggested; "the hospital train does not arrive. We have only one bottle left. He is unconscious; perhaps it can be done without an anæsthetic."

The surgeon did not even answer. He put the mask over the wounded man's face, whilst the cries from outside went on like those of beasts under the butcher's knife; sprinkled the chloroform on the cotton-wool with a steady hand, and held it under the nose of the major, who had been turned on his back.

"Take the pulse, nurse."

"Yes, doctor. . . ."

Nurse Ruth might count in vain; the pulse was so feeble that even her practised fingers could not find it.

"I cannot find any pulse."

"It's all right. . . . Go on. . . ."

The patient was turned over. With deep incisions the flesh and muscles were parted from the bone.

"I was right; it is sticking in the fifth vertebra, nurse. Give me the forceps."

The fragment of the fork was uncovered. It had penetrated almost an inch, but the point was still visible.

"If that thing breaks all is useless," thought the surgeon, as he carefully took hold with his forceps and slowly tried to move it.

"It's coming: it will be all right, nurse!"

The doctor concentrated his whole attention on the minute point of steel. He muttered softly, to himself. . . .

"So . . . so . . . so . . . slowly . . . that's it. . . ."

A sharp pull. . . .

Success! He uttered a joyous exclamation and held up the point on his forceps.

"Now look, nurse, I don't think that anything has been left in the wound."

"No, nothing. That was really a wonderful operation!"

"You see!"

The surgeon was quite happy.

"Now give me that solution of sublimate."

The basin of pink liquid was handed; the wound slowly and carefully washed.

"That thing was dirty; what a point that fork had! . . . But it will be all right with my antiseptics. . . ."

It took a good five minutes for the surgeon to finish his careful work; the cleanliness of the wound was everything. . . . At last.

"Now the box with the iodoform, nurse, and the bandage."

Without a word nurse Ruth carried out his orders. She had not thought it possible that the operation could be successful; she was convinced that the rusty point would break and remain in the bone; and she still doubted whether the patient could live. While the surgeon dusted on the yellow powder she modestly inquired:

"Will you be able to save him, doctor?"

"I hope so, nurse, but he will be paralysed, and the wound will be tuberculous, for the spinal marrow was pierced."

"Horrible; death would have been better," said nurse Ruth.

"With tuberculosis one can live another ten years, if one takes care," remarked the surgeon.

The bandages were put on. The major was still unconscious.

"Have you got the oxygen, nurse?"

"Yes, here it is."

After five minutes' work, Berkersburg made a movement. A slight colour appeared on his pallid cheeks.

"The pulse is beginning to get stronger."

"There you see, my dear, we have got him."

"Yes, doctor," assented the nurse, with a smile of content.

"Now look at bed No. 18."

Nurse Ruth turned round. She went up to the bed and stood there silent.

"Well?"

No answer.

In bed No. 18 lay a lieutenant nineteen years old. He lay very still.

"You were right, doctor," said nurse Ruth, her voice trembling.

"Why are you crying?"

"I knew the story of this dead boy, surgeon."

"So . . . !"

"He was the only son of his mother, who gave her all that he might become an officer, and he was only nineteen. . . . He told me about his mother before going into action."

"Well, nurse . . . shot in the head and an inflammation . . . there was nothing to be done. . . . The ice machine useless, not a bit of ice for twenty-four hours; you know yourself there was nothing to be done. Don't cry. I cannot have

crying nurses. I have told you that a dozen times already. Now help me ! ”

Without a word nurse Ruth obeyed. They took the warm corpse of the young lieutenant out of bed No. 18 and laid it on the floor of the room. “ Because,” said the surgeon, “ I have no more time ; the others outside all want help. So let’s take the major.”

“ In the same bed ? ”

“ For God’s sake, nurse, meningitis is not contagious ; thank heaven, this bed is free. Out here, two and a half miles behind the firing-line, we must be economical. Come along ! ”

Berkersburg was placed in bed No. 18.

“ Give him three teaspoonfuls of lemon water when he has come round. . . . Until later then. . . . ”

Instruments in hand, the surgeon went out, for he must look after the ambulances and pick out the cases that needed operation.

CHAPTER IX

O MANTLE BURDENSOME !

FOR nine days von Berkersburg hovered between life and death, but the efforts of the surgeon and the nurse pulled him through, and at last the wounded man, who, humanly speaking, was incurable, was taken in a hospital train to Germany. Never again would he see the front, although, out of pity, his questions and entreaties were so answered as to allow him to hope.

What he felt ? Who guessed the thoughts of this man, who had only lifted his mask to one man in the woods behind, who had been outspoken and sincere only once in his whole life ?

No one but Schlosser knew. Who could say whether he would survive this terrible war to give evidence ? To no one else was the real face visible ; to no relative, no wife, certainly not to Melanie.

At the door of the Manor-house in Falkenstein a telegraph messenger from the Wirballen Post Office was ringing. By accident Melanie herself opened the door, coming through the house from the yard where she had been feeding the fowls and pigeons. At the sight of the messenger her heart throbbed in anxious expectation, and she grew deadly pale.

For weeks no news had come direct to Falken-

stein from the western front. Nothing but the victorious messages of the German Press, which turned every reverse to the opposite, and explained every withdrawal on the grounds of higher strategy. And so during these weeks in Berlin, and over all Germany, victory after victory was celebrated, while villages and farms were destroyed by the Russians, while the great army was driven back from Paris at the Marne, while thousands and hundreds of thousands bled to death in vain in Poland and in the waves of the Yser.

But about this Melanie knew nothing; like the millions of German people, she had only a dull apprehension of it. Like all those millions she knew only this, that the business had been going on for weeks and months without any result, that the casualty lists became fuller every day, until they were no longer published, and that mourning and resignation had taken the place of enthusiasm and assurance of victory.

And in the sleepless nights when the face of her far-off friend painted itself on the darkness, Melanie asked herself how long resignation and wavering faith must last before the blood-red sun of truth rose, and cruel certainty rent the misty veil of delusions and dreams.

Melanie took the telegram from the messenger. She instinctively felt that she had in her hands the scroll of her fate, the sign-post to her future path; but she was able to give the man a small tip and a few words of thanks, notwithstanding her suspense. Then she went upstairs to open it in peace in her room, and to read what she already knew, and had not doubted for a single moment.

The telegram had been sent by Schlosser. It said, laconically, like all telegrams in these days:

“Major von Berkersburg seriously wounded, coming home. Captain Adolf dead.”

To this sentence Melanie's mind was nailed. She did not weep, only a slight sound came from her throat as if she were suffocating. With all her resolution she controlled herself; dipped a sponge in cold water and pressed it on her burning eyes.

She rang the bell.

The maid who answered it was terrified at the sight of her mistress's ashen face, with purple stains under the eyes, disordered hair, and parted lips.

But Melanie's voice was perfectly calm as she said :

“Take this telegram to your master.”

“Very well, madam.”

“Stop, is my father suffering from gout just now ? ”

“As he does every day, madam.”

“Then give the telegram to Wuerz. Wuerz must deliver it at an opportune moment. Do you understand ? Wuerz knows him best of all.”

“Very well, madam, Wuerz.”

The girl took the telegram from Melanie's hand. She was full of curiosity. Something terrible must be in this telegram, or her mistress would not be in such a condition, she, who the last few weeks had been comparatively cheerful, quite a contrast to the baron, who was always in despair and expected the worst every day. The worst must be announced by this telegram. The major must be dead !

Thus thinking, the maid left Melanie's room to give the telegram, as her mistress ordered. She

was quite right; Wuerz, liked by nobody in the house, was the only person who understood the baron, with his complaints and his dissatisfaction with every one and everything. Certainly it was he who must tell the baron of the telegram and break the news of the major's death.

The maid read it herself, and read it again. Well, after all, that was not so bad. Seriously wounded, but travelling home already. If he was on his way home how could he be so bad? the girl reasoned. He must be out of danger, wounded, but wounded seriously. Perhaps this was to prepare them for something terrible, perhaps an arm or leg was off, perhaps even both arms and legs.

How terrible all this was! quite unthinkable. A man like the major, in the prime of life; who had always been considered a handsome man, and who had looked so well in uniform, now suddenly without arms or legs. . . . A cripple, quite helpless, unable to dress or feed himself, needing assistance in all his bodily functions. Horrible!

But there was something more in this telegram. Captain Adolf dead! The maid did not remember this captain Adolf. At the time of his visits she had not come to Falkenstein. No doubt he was a friend of the major's whose death was casually mentioned because the telegram was being sent.

She met Wuerz in the hall. He was going to the kitchen to change the linseed poultice for the baron, who for the last fortnight had maintained that linseed was the only thing that made his pain endurable.

"I say, Wuerz."

"Yes, miss."

Wuerz only addressed her as "Miss" now, since

she had rejected his attempts at familiarity, and since madam decided that she should be called "Miss."

"Madam says that you are to tell the baron at a convenient time the contents of this telegram."

"Any news?"

Curiosity lit up the eyes of Wuerz.

"Read it yourself."

"Severely wounded . . . pity . . . but I thought that all along, miss. With those seventy-fives of the French nobody comes back whole; you will see how right I am. Their field-artillery is much better than ours; but we are not allowed to say it, although every child in Germany knows it."

"Is that so?"

"And captain Adolf is dead. Dear, dear. He was a charming fellow, so musical, he could improvise on the piano till the tears came to one's eyes."

"Do you know captain Adolf?"

"Do I know captain Adolf, miss? He was at Falkenstein a few years ago during the manœuvres when you had not yet the honour to be in the baronial service."

"Oh; and do you know anything else about captain Adolf?"

The girl was inquisitive, and with feminine instinct scented an interesting connection between the mysterious condition of her mistress and the death of captain Adolf. She read many novels in her spare time, and she believed in the old saying that in every house there is a skeleton in the cupboard. She asks again:

"Don't you know anything else about the mysterious captain Adolf, Wuerz?"

"Why do you call him mysterious, miss?"

"I have my reasons, Wuerz, for calling him mysterious," replied the girl, smiling mysteriously herself.

Wuerz, who liked nothing better than making himself interesting, and who was not averse from the Figaro pose, answered in a still more mysterious tone :

"Well, yes, miss, there was a little romance about it, and every one was talking of it when Captain Adolf was billeted here."

"In connection with madam, Wuerz ?"

"Of course in connection with her ; we all thought he was going to propose to her. The bench under the oak-tree, which stands near the fishpond, could tell you something, if benches could tell you anything at all. And suddenly and unexpectedly the young lady got engaged to the major, who is twenty years her senior, although the lieutenant suited her much better. Money difficulties, said the Jew at Wirballen, miss, with as knavish a smile as if he were an Englishman and not a Jew."

"Don't crack jokes, Wuerz."

"I am not joking, miss ; I am quite in earnest. To-day one Englishman is ten times worse than ten Jews ; he is the worst sharper in the whole Orient ! Yes, you can see it in black and white in the East Prussian newspapers. But you never read the newspaper, even at this time : you only read novels."

The maid was not listening.

"Now I understand, now everything is clear," she muttered. So it was the death of the captain and not the wounds of the major that had affected her mistress. There was a skeleton in the cupboard here, too.

“The linseed is hot, Wuerz,” called the cook from the kitchen.

“I am coming !”

Wuerz departed, and the girl disappeared into the servants’ hall, where of course she imparted the great secret to every one.

CHAPTER X

A SICK WRETCH

IN front of the first fire lit that year in the hall of the Manor-house, sat von Falkenstein, waiting impatiently for his linseed poultice. His long pipe stood in the corner by his arm-chair, to which he was now confined. Huddled in his dressing-gown he was nursing his bare, swollen left foot.

“When is the man coming?”

He looked impatiently at the clock, which monotonously told second by second. At least five minutes more had passed! Suppose he had got talking to one of the girls? Irritably the old man took up a newspaper. For one minute he forgot his gout and put his foot on the floor too quickly, to his great discomposure.

He sought solace in the Wirballen paper, though he had already gone through it about five times that day and knew it by heart. But once again he read with satisfaction: “Great victory over the Russians! Hindenburg makes eighty thousand prisoners!” He did not reflect that Russia had one and a half million in reserve, that Siberia is a hundred times bigger than East Prussia: “Hindenburg has captured 80,000 Russians”; there it was in black and white. If it is in the paper it must be true.

Von Falkenstein was in great spirits Eighty

thousand Russians, quite a number ! There would soon be no room for more prisoners in Germany, and no bread for them. People were crying out already about prices ; forty-five marks for one hundred lbs. of peas, and the flour mixed with potatoes already. That was for the eighty thousand Russians ; we could make room for them. England might close the ports and keep out food, there would be enough all the same. The harvest was good, also for the eighty thousand Russians. He forgot that there was less bread but more room in Siberia. Why should he not ? Hindenburg had the prisoners, and that was the principal thing. . . . He was quite satisfied.

He took his stick and tried to limp about on his aching foot.

“ Confound it ! ”

But the thought of the eighty thousand Russian prisoners gave him energy.

In the hall hung a map of the eastern front.

He must study the map. He must find the place where the great Hindenburg took prisoner these eighty thousand Russians. “ The man who drove three times as many Russians,” said Moscovitzch, the favourite forester, “ into the Mansurian Lakes, and purged East Prussia of them.”

“ Confound it ! ”

The baron hunted on the map. “ Warsaw, the Vistula, and the Wart . . . Thorn.”

“ Oh Lord ! Thorn ? Suppose the Russians should come to Thorn ? ” But that idea was ridiculous. Hindenburg would drive them into the lakes, and, if there were no lakes, he would drive them somewhere else. One could rely on Hindenburg.

His forester, that was a fine chap, though now

nearly seventy. He went through the war of 1870 as a young man, like himself. Then he had no gouty foot ; he could stand any number of bottles and play cards all night. Now the doctor has forbidden him to take any alcohol ; but the forester was still allowed to do what he liked.

At St. Privat he had saved his master's life. Ah, those were times, the time of Napoleon III and St. Privat. Then France was crushed by young Germany, as it would have been crushed by now, if England had not been "perfidious Albion," and this miserable Belgium had not refused to allow his Majesty to walk through the country. Thinking of England, von Falkenstein clenched his fist and stamped on the ground.

"Oh, confound it !"

Wuerz came in with the steaming poultice.

"Baron, what are you doing ? You know you are not allowed to get up under any circumstances."

"It's all right, Wuerz."

"And certainly not without having your foot bandaged."

Wuerz was the one man in the establishment for whom the old man had any respect ; Wuerz understood him. Therefore he allowed Wuerz to take hold of him like a little child and lead him back to the arm-chair.

"Now, baron, please sit down."

"Confound this foot."

"It will be all right, baron ! A hot poultice is the best thing, the doctor says. Please put your foot up." Wuerz began to put the boiling hot poultice round the joint.

"Hang it, do you want to roast me alive, as the Cossacks did the Schmalkalden people ? Do you hear me ? Damn you !"

Wuerz was adamant. He went on applying the poultice and assuring the baron that heat was everything.

"Believe me, heat is everything. I was only afraid it might not be hot enough."

"Go to the devil!"

"If you treat me in that way, baron!"

"What do you mean, Wuerz, treat me in that way? What do you want?"

Wuerz knew his master. Curiosity was his most prevalent weakness. Wuerz only smiled, as if he had good news for the baron.

"What is it?"

Wuerz paused a moment in order to raise the baron's curiosity to a higher pitch.

Then he said, deliberately: "We have some news from the western front, baron."

The other opened his eyes and looked as though he would drag Wuerz's words out of his mouth.

"Victory, Wuerz? A conclusive, definite victory over the French? That is the only possible information from the western front."

Wuerz smiled like Figaro.

"Personal information. The telegram which madam received just now."

"News from my son-in-law?"

"Right, baron."

"Good news?"

"As far as I can see, not the worst, baron."

"Thank God! Let us have it."

Wuerz hesitated again. "Perhaps it is better to tell the baron in reverse order, so that he may not be alarmed."

"What do you mean by reverse order?"

"I only mean the unimportant first, then the pleasant, and then the less pleasant."

"How you understand the condition of my nerves!"

"Don't I, baron," said Wuerz complacently.

"Does the baron perhaps remember captain Adolf? He was at that time first-lieutenant."

"Who was that again, Wuerz?"

"The gentleman who a couple of years ago was billeted at Falkenstein during the manœuvres." Wuerz hesitated.

"Go on, Wuerz, don't be afraid!"

"And who, if I am not mistaken . . . at that time . . . Miss Melanie. . . ."

"Right, I remember something of that. He was fair and had a short moustache."

"That is how all the gentlemen wear them since his Majesty burned his with a cigarette."

"Correct, correct, Rudolf? Well, what about him?"

"No, Adolf, baron."

"Never mind the Adolf."

"He was shot dead, the telegram says."

"Poor boy! but so many fall now; there is nothing surprising about it."

"No, baron, there is nothing surprising about it; every day a couple of thousands fall, that is quite the usual thing now."

"And my son-in-law, major von Berkersburg?"

"The major is coming home, baron."

"Coming home? But that is glorious! Then at last we shall have a third man for cards. Pastor Mueller from Wirballen plays too badly for words, and he will soon be quite deaf."

"Yes, but . . ."

"What do you mean by 'but?' " asked the baron.

"There is something else in the telegram."

Wuerz inwardly accused himself of clumsiness in bringing it out like this.

"What's that? . . . If he comes home to make a third at cards, so much the better for him. What else can there be in the telegram?"

"Have you forgotten that the telegram comes from the front? The telegram says that the major is wounded, and seriously wounded."

"And is coming home; how must I understand that?"

"That is what I do not know yet, baron. But the major might have lost an arm or leg; that is what one calls seriously wounded."

The baron scratched his head. Perhaps Wuerz was right. "If an arm, well, let's hope it is only one."

"I think we must wait quietly, Wuerz. If he is travelling home! . . . Well, anything is possible. This linseed is doing its work well. The doctor's advice was good. Give me my pipe."

"There you are, baron."

"Now give me a light; you know I want it."

"Certainly, baron."

Wuerz lighted the baron's long pipe.

"Ah, that Varinas II tobacco, after all, is the best."

CHAPTER XI

THE ATMOSPHERE DARK FOR EVERMORE

THREE days afterwards von Berkersburg arrived at Falkenstein, only a shadow of his former self. Wuerz could not resist the temptation of decorating the front-door with a wreath of fir boughs; all the oak leaves had withered. His Majesty's words, "Before the trees shed their leaves, we shall all be back in the dear Fatherland again," had not come true. Nevertheless, he draped the black, white, and red flag round the door and put up a board with the legend: "Hearty welcome to the returned victor."

A weary smile came over the pallid, emaciated face of the traveller as he caught sight of the faithful servant's decorations.

"So that is how a victor looks," he thought.

Shattered nerves and an agonising wound in the back, those were the only trophies. He continually dreamed of the roar of cannon, and awake he saw always blood and corpses, corpses and blood. Everything he looked at seemed tinged with that terrible crimson. He was scarcely able to swallow a mouthful, because his food seemed soaked in blood. For the slightest cause or none, he would weep like a little child.

These terrible fits of weeping would come on at any moment, exhausting him body and mind. It

seemed as if the tears of the women and children of Rosey, whose homes he had ordered to be set on fire, had been collected that they might flow from his own eyes. Among a thousand ignorant and unthinking fools, he went into the war as one who knew what he was doing. He felt that the judgment of God was upon him.

At the sight of the man the servants were stricken dumb. The old baron could not crack one joke; the questions that the household had longed to put remained unuttered. His looks spoke too clearly. Curiosity and interest gave way to horror and pity. Only in the eyes of one burned a devouring and inexorable flame. Melanie meant to know the truth at any cost. But her husband hardly said a word; only curt and conventional phrases.

Immediately after his arrival he was carried to his room by Wuerz and another servant. The first visit he received in the morning was that of the local doctor, who repeated to the baron and Melanie what he had read in the report of the military surgeon: "Serious nervous derangement, the development of which cannot be foretold, and badly healed wound in the back, with injured spinal marrow, which will probably produce slow tuberculosis."

The doctor did not conceal the likelihood of very serious results. In the hall of the Manor-house, over a bottle of claret and a cigar, he had a long conversation with the father-in-law and the wife of the patient. The former so constantly interrupted with questions about his own health that the old doctor became quite impatient, and once replied rather sharply. But the gouty baron was far too selfish to trouble his head over the illness of other people, and Melanie accepted the

diagnosis of the doctor so calmly that he felt as if he had received a cold douche. He was very glad when he was once more seated in his carriage and returning to town. "The devil . . . !" he thought, "such cold-bloodedness I have never come across in all my practice !" He took his leave with a few civil words, promising next day to send a nurse from the municipal hospital at Wirballen.

He considered a trained nurse absolutely necessary because of the patient's inability to move. Von Falkenstein and Melanie agreed.

Nurse Ursula, of the municipal hospital, arrived punctually next morning. The patient had had a very bad night. No thought of breakfast, the wound was more painful than ever, and he begged for an injection of morphia, which after long hesitation the nurse administered. Under its soothing influence he became quieter, was able to sip some coffee, and could even say a few words.

"Call my wife, nurse !"

"If it does not excite you too much !"

The nurse regretted making any objection, for the lips of the major began to twitch ominously. The doctor had warned her against the crying fits that very morning ; the patient's nerves were so weak that he might have a complete breakdown any moment. Once again came her patient's entreaty, like the prayer of a little child, in his voice already full of tears :

"Call my wife, nurse."

Without a word the nurse left the room in obedience to the wish of her patient. The major, whose wheeled-chair nurse Ursula had put near the window, gazed at the autumnal and leafless park of Falkenstein. He could see only the flames of burning villages, the red blood from the streaming

wounds of the thousands who had dyed the soil of Flanders, France, and Poland with indelible stains. No tribunal of history in time to come could ever remove those stains from the book of shame.

From his terrible visions Berkersburg was suddenly startled. The door opened and a sombre shadow, draped in mourning black, glided into the room. It might have recalled to him, if he had ever seen it, that grave next to the church in Rosey in which lay young Bugnon and the old curé. Berkersburg looked unrecognisingly at the shadow, once his wife, now a stranger.

"Was it the Goddess of Revenge," asked his fevered mind, "who had entered the room?"

This woman would never understand, never forgive. Melanie was followed by the nurse, like the glimmer of moonlight by the side of the lurid torch of doom, he thought: the nurse, all kindness and charity, the figure in the black robe, the pitiless herald of the last sentence. He longed to cling to the nurse's presence, she seemed a protection; but he brought himself to utter the words: "I want to be alone with my wife, nurse."

The nurse arranged the invalid's cushions, pushed closer the little table with the lemonade, and asked in her sweet voice:

"Is there nothing I can do for you, major?"

He forced himself to reply,

"No nurse, leave me alone with my wife."

She went out. For the first time since that farewell in the garrison town, Melanie and Berkersburg were alone together.

The grey autumn light fell on her tall, slender figure. Years ago he had seen the Antigone of Sophocles on the stage: "I am not here to hate:

"I am not here to love!" Was she like that? But no . . . a different expression moulded these firmly closed lips which would never soften into pity. Judith who brought to Israel the trophy of Holofernes' head might have looked thus. Deep silence lay between them. The clock on the wall told the seconds. No word was said. Melanie went to the window, almost turning her back upon her husband, and drummed nervously on the glass. At last she spoke :

"Why did you send for me?"

Nothing more; not even his Christian name, nothing.

"For whom are you in mourning, Melanie?"

The question seemed hard; she felt it, but her answer was harder still. Her words fell like the strokes of a hammer on iron. War and terror had killed pity; sorrow had been strangled in her bosom. Now Berkersburg heard it in her cold answer :

"I am in mourning for Adolf."

"Your lover!"

"One who was more dear to me than any on earth."

She smiled scornfully, and he felt far too weak to press her any further. The tears welled up again, his throat was full: the sanguine vision of Troyon and of Rosey rose before his eyes.

"Go, go!" he said brokenly. Without a word or a look Melanie left the room.

CHAPTER XII

WORDS OF WAILING

THE hours that Berkersburg dreaded most were the hours of night, the long, dragging, sleepless nights of autumn, when the wind howled against the windows of Falkenstein and the never-healing wound throbbed and burned.

About ten o'clock nurse Ursula would put him to bed ; every night she would ask with kindness and sweetness what he wished, and every night he would answer that he wanted nothing ; after which she would disappear through the door into the next room and go to bed herself.

Then it began. The monotonous ticking of the clock added second to second, and he was not able to get a quarter of an hour of refreshing sleep. Even from one side to the other he could not move ; the slightest movement was misery. That wound in the spine would never heal. He must lie motionless ; and then the pictures would come—not dreams, not the fancies of a very sick man ; true, horrible pictures, bitten into his brain with the tooth of ever-gnawing remorse. The frightful panorama unrolled.

The station of the old garrison-town. The multitude of people saying good-bye, waving handkerchiefs, shaking hands ; all for the men decorated with flowers and oak-leaves. All singing, whistling, drinking, and smoking, festive as if they

were going to a dance. The long columns of old men, the troops of newly enlisted conscripts of last autumn, the never-ending columns of thousands. Pushing through the frontier, through Luxemburg, through Belgium to the North of France, as if victory would be achieved in a few weeks. Only a crowd of cattle for the butcher, cannon-fodder, food for the French seventy-fives ; targets for the great guns of the British dread-noughts on the coast of Belgium ; mere human débris filling the plains of Flanders and France with countless layers, heap upon heap of dead.

And over these wide lands covered by a pall of smoke, with their empurpled canals and rivers, the flaming light of the burned towns and smouldering villages ! This industrious and prosperous land was now one glowing oven in which the nations, be they foe or friend, were being roasted alive.

Lying there, thinking of all that had passed, Berkersburg felt as if he had arisen from the realm of Beelzebub, the chief of all the devils. What had Holy Scripture said of him ? "He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him." A murderer—from the beginning.

But what was the use of all this thinking ? Why must these terrible thoughts come over and over again ? Pictures, more and more pictures. Pictures of horror, pictures of madness, against which he would have fought, which he would have resisted if he could : ceaseless pictures, long day and interminable night. For he had seen them with his mortal eyes, and nothing could blot them out. Europe fighting itself. The mother carven to pieces ; the body from whom all these nations had been born rent and torn.

That was the primary thought of all ; that was the picture of these pictures, made up out of myriads of fragments of mosaic into one colossal image of madness and terror. The world out of gear can never be set right : insanity unchecked ; the world out of gear. The sea full of mines, death waiting at each cliff. From every hill-top arrows of death ; every valley choked with the crop of death ; the Mower stalking from land to land with fleshless face and bony arms. The air thick with poisonous words of hatred and riot, envenoming all the nations.

The narrow-eyed let loose against their white brethren. Negroes lashed like bloodhounds against the noble game of the earth. Dark-skinned men from Indus and Ganges as executioners of justice. Fanatics of Islam hounded on to destroy the work of western culture, the green flag and the victorious emblem of the crescent floating over their heads. " In the name of Allah the All-powerful. . . . "

In his name, the world out of gear. . . . Hordes from the Russian steppes, as in the days of the Huns and the Magyars. A cloud of locusts from the farthest horizons of the morning setting down on the green fields, leaving them brown and bare.

Thus in his agonising pain he was condemned to think, thus to picture during the endless nights. Eternity seemed to be given him in which to anatomise the confused picture of the general misery.

Softly Berkersburg spoke to himself. What was his own small life against the misery of the universe, he asked himself for the thousandth time ; and yet was not his own more to him ?

Was it not more awful to him than anything else, this fight in the forest of Troyon, Adolf's rescue

and his own, the assassination of his friend, the fire, Rosey, the wound at the farm, and at last the wish to kill, the will to betray? What did this signify compared to the throes in which to-day the earth was labouring? and yet, was it not more to him?

Did it not encompass the beginning and end of the catastrophe in whose flames new worlds were being forged; that drew itself like an indestructible ring of steel round the body of the globe? Did it not show in a small mirror what was the beginning of crime and discord? Envy, jealousy, faithlessness, treason, the word given to the Holiest broken, treaties torn up, fundamentals tottering on which once humanity's Holy of holies stood. . . . The lie. . . . Here, as there, the lie. . . . The sin against the Holy Ghost. . . . Here as there. . . . In the fate of Adolf, in his own, as in the fate of the universe. . . . Powers of revenge on himself and on others—powers of revenge on Rosey and on the world.

Forgetful of his wound, Berkersburg tried to leap from his bed, but fell back and cried aloud in agony.

Powers of revenge on him! Through the darkness of his room pierced two eyes unseen by him. The eyes of Melanie, his wife, who every night had crept on tiptoe into the room listening to his dreams, waiting to find out his crime that she divined.

Powers of revenge in the form of his wife haunted his couch. She listened for every breath, for any murmured word, for any movement that might reveal his inmost secret. Powers of revenge in this sick room as he himself had called them down on Rosey. . . .

In despair, the sweat of terror on his brow, Berkersburg folded his hands. He prayed. "He

can pray still," said Melanie to herself. He could still pray, and she would steal his prayer as he once stole her love and the sacrifice of her maidenhood. . . .

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth ; the device of these days bringing death and destruction ; the leitmotif of the Old Testament before there was ever a doctrine of charity and of forgiveness of trespasses. Nation against nation, brother against brother, friend against friend, wife against husband. The maxim of to-day : " Might above right." Those were victorious who could spit out the greatest amount of destruction.

Melanie stole. As he himself had stolen, so she stole the shew-loaves from the altar of the Temple ; the loaves belonging to God : the thoughts of his heart, the secret of his guilt, which he wished to reveal only to the All-knowing and the All-judging. . . .

" And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," the scorching lips of Berkersburg muttered. " My sin against Adolf, who saved me. God in heaven !—My immortal sin ; for the wish to kill is murder already. . . . O God in heaven ! forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Moaning he sank on his pillow. . . . Words came no longer ; his brain had no wings any more, and the word without meaning cannot soar into heaven. He did not believe, for he never had believed. He had not prayed : he had only confessed.

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. . . . Powers of revenge over his couch of agony. Powers of revenge over Rosey, called up by his command. Two burning orbs met his in the darkened room. . . . What was it ? Was it really two eyes full of

hatred, full of inexorable, unquenchable hatred, fixed upon him by the black-robed Nemesis who now glided from his room ? Was it she ? Was it a ghost ?

He tried to cry out. He tried to call for nurse Ursula. She must relieve him from the mountain piled on his chest, from the phantoms of his fancy that were driving him mad, from the Goddess of Revenge who was hovering round him. The nurse must come. She must bring light. She must put her cool soft hand on his brow. . . . He could not call. He could not use his will.

The terrors of the battle-fields of Flanders and Northern France, of Troyon and Rosey, had lamed his wings, had broken the nature which he once thought like iron, had made him into an unnerved old man or puling baby. . . .

Why . . . weep . . . wait. . . . suffer, suffer, suffer, and then die after enough suffering ? Well, he had suffered enough, he who bore his sufferings across the earth. . . . Wait . . . wait . . . and not call. . . . wait until the morning. . . . Words without meaning cannot reach Heaven. . . .

And so he lay, staring at the ceiling until the dull gleam of the autumn sun crept into the room : then at last, at last, came morning.

CHAPTER XIII

WRAPT IN TERROR

FALKENSTEIN was in flames ; like a judgment^{of} Heaven fire fell on the house of the old nobleman in the middle of the night. It burned like Liège and Namur, Antwerp, Malines, and Louvain ; like Lille, Arras, Maubeuge, and Rosey. The black, moonless night was like a crimson day with the glare of fire from the villages round the estate. The Cossacks were in East Prussia and Falkenstein.

The alarm-bell from the church of Wirballen announced the terror. "The Cossacks are upon you !" Hordes of the plains from Don and Volga ; Tartars from the wastes of Siberia ; horse and rider drove before them a people gone mad with fright.

From the forest of Eydtkuhnen towards the main road from Gumbinnen, a procession, homeless and inconsolable, was flying to the west, flying before this cloud of locusts from the grassy steppes of Podolia and Volhynia. . . .

They were the executioners of the Czar, practised servants of blood-thirsty agents, who had been at work in Petrograd and Moscow, in Kief and Odessa. Faith in the Little Father and his Church, fanaticism for great and holy Russia shone from their wild eyes. Hordes and hordes from the Steppes were over the whole land. Man and maid, master and servant fled from Falkenstein.

Melanie's pretty but too inquisitive little maid was carried off by a yellow Tartar into the Eydt-kuhnen Forest and there became his prey. Now she was sleeping her last sleep with her throat cut—victim of great and holy Russia, in the name of the Czar.

The horde of devils drove the lost in front of them. Burning farms and villages lighted the road like torches.

To the West! To the West!

Peasants' wagons, perambulators with the last scanty possessions of the villagers, coaches of the squires, here and there a forgotten motor-car—all in a confused mass, and between them the thousands who had to go on foot with aching soles and weeping eyes, into which bit the smoke of the home burnt and lost for ever; and behind them the Cossacks. . . .

"Aho! Ahu! . . . In the name of the Czar! . . ."

The old coachman who once brought Melanie from the station of Wirballen drove the carriage furiously. He lashed the horses, blinded in the darkness of the wood and frenzied by the glare from near and far.

"Aho! Ahu! The Cossacks are after us! . . ."

"Whip the horses. For God's sake, whip the horses!" shouted old von Falkenstein. "The fellows are just behind us! . . ."

The coachman lashed and swore and drove like mad.

"Ahu! Aho! . . ."

Forgotten was von Falkenstein's gout. He clenched his hand in pain, pain which he hardly felt from terror, on the pocket of his coat. In it was a pocket-book containing the last banknotes from the safe at Falkenstein; the last that were

left to him, and who could know whether to-morrow he will be worth a penny, for the Cossacks were upon him, and his people. . . .

“Ahu! Aho!”

The yells pierced through him. . . . Crackling and crashing in the distance; a sea of sparks in the dark sky like a gigantic firework; villages fallen together; farms disappearing in smoke and ashes. Trailing processions of the squires who had stuck so firmly to their own; who had forced the peasants to be their serfs, as they had required and obliged the teachers to be the instruments of their will on the peasants.

Holy Russia and the Cossacks upon them!

At the back of the carriage, which was slowly working its way through the deep mud of the forest road, lay Berkersburg. Not a sound escaped through his clenched teeth; his face was deadly pale. He lay there like a corpse, and his diseased mind only held one thought: “Powers of revenge on Rosey!”

They had been warned in time at Falkenstein, before the “Ahu! Aho!” of the Cossacks sounded in the courtyard of the Manor-house. Before the fire had seized the roof of the castle the rough hands of the men, who had fled there before the Russians from the four quarters of the compass, took the wounded man from his bed, carried him downstairs, and placed him in the carriage.

Ursula tended him, but her care was of no avail. His wound burned like fire, like the fire of hell. Berkersburg could feel that something serious had occurred. The unhealed wound must have opened. The bandage had moved; the bone was exposed, and each movement of the carriage caused him almost unendurable pain, but he uttered no word;

he only gazed at the terrified eyes of his father-in-law, the whimpering fool, who even in this hour could think of nothing but his precious life and his possessions ; who could do nothing but adjure the coachman to beat the fatigued and frightened horses.

The old man rose from his seat, leant out of the carriage window, and looked back.

"They are just behind us," he cried. "Beat the horses, Christian !"

But it was only the shifting shadows of the trees cast here and there by the driving flames. At present the Cossacks were ransacking the farms and did not think of pursuing. They fell on the rich land like a swarm of wasps in the middle of summer, who have scented the rotting apples under the fruit-trees.

"Where can she have gone ?" von Falkenstein said at last.

No answer. . . .

"Have you any idea, nurse Ursula ?"

"Not the faintest, sir."

"It is horrible. She must have fallen into their hands."

"I do not believe that, sir."

"Why do not you believe it ?"

"Because I think that madam is safe."

"Why do you think so, nurse ? If you can reassure me you must tell me."

"Madam left yesterday before any one heard a word about the entrance of the Russians into Wirballen. Madam will have left. . . ."

At nurse Ursula's words Berkersburg's eyes were eagerly fixed on her, but he said not a word. . . . The father insisted.

"You know something definite, nurse Ursula.

Why do you conclude that my daughter left Wirballen yesterday? Where did she go?"

The nurse was silent. She had observed the interest with which Berkersburg followed her every word, and she was convinced that it meant the husband's death-blow if she gave the father an answer and he heard it.

The latter went on: "You know something definite, nurse; something quite definite. You know where my daughter is. You know that she travelled from Wirballen yesterday, without saying good-bye to us, not to her father, not to her husband. Do not torture us: this is war, nurse."

The nurse could not decide what to reply to this question.

"Ahu! Aho!"

Von Falkenstein sprang up, terrified.

"Is it they? For God's sake, is it they?"

But it was only the coachman trying to rouse up the horses, which had fallen into a walk and would not quicken their pace.

"Tell me, nurse."

With frightful exertion, but imperative as one of his orders in former days, came the words from Berkersburg. The power of the command reduced the nurse to obedience.

"Madam wrote to me."

"Wrote to you? And you did not tell me till now?"

Nurse Ursula accepted von Falkenstein's reproach quietly. She took no further notice of him; but fixed her alarmed gaze on the face of Berkersburg, whose bloodshot eyes seemed to look through her. She shivered at the terrible voice which with a final effort commanded:

"Go on, nurse Ursula."

Hesitating, but unable to withstand his will, she proceeded :

"Madam was going to Koenigsberg and from there to Berlin, so she cannot have fallen into the hands of the Cossacks ; although she made me promise to tell nobody a word of her letter, or her decision, I believe I must tell the gentlemen this, to satisfy them that the Cossacks will not be able to harm madam. . . ."

"And has my daughter told you anything of her plans, nurse Ursula ? Why she is going to Koenigsberg and Berlin ?"

Berkersburg, staring in front of him, could guess why.

"No, sir," lied the nurse instinctively.

The pious lie was of no avail. Berkersburg understood well enough that Melanie knew the truth, and that she had left him for ever. Something glittered in his hand. There was a flash in the carriage—a dull report. . . . A cry from von Falkenstein ; a shriek from the nurse, who bent over Berkersburg, and felt his face. In the restricted space she could do nothing.

The groans of the old man shattered the last remnant of her composure.

"What has he done ? Has he shot himself ? Speak, nurse. . . ."

The cold trembling hands of the nurse searched over Berkersburg's body. At last they came in contact with a stream of something thick and warm. She answered in a shaking voice :

"In the middle of the heart, it seems to me, sir. In the middle of the heart."

Frantically the coachman was flogging the horses.

"Ahu ! Aho !" —Cossacks, really Cossacks this time ; no phantoms of the imagination.

There were revolver-shots. The coachman fell from his seat ; the horses staggered and sank down ; the carriage stopped. Bronzed faces stared in on the old man, on the dead body of Berkersburg. Outside in the mud lay Christian and the horses in a pool of blood. The revolvers cracked again : then there was silence.

Dirty hands felt for von Falkenstein's pocket-book and his cherished bank-notes. Dirty hands dragged the deadly wounded nurse across the mossy ground of the forest into the underwood. The bodies of Berkersburg and Falkenstein lay across each other by the horses, the coachman, and the overturned carriage.

"Cossacks of the Czar upon you !" Judgment from heaven. Powers of revenge—as on Rosey.

But Berkersburg could not hear any more.

As the companies through the forest of Troyon, the troop of Cossacks went through the forest of Eydtkuhnen. The swarm of wasps that had settled down upon the rotting apples under the trees had winged its way through the forest.

So they passed.

FOURTH BOOK
THE FULL REVELATION

CHAPTER I

IN SILENCE AND SOLITUDE

WITHOUT regard to the time-table the express rushed through the black night on its journey from Berlin to Aix-la-Chapelle. It conveyed the ambulance of the famous physician and surgeon, Wilhelmi, to the battle-fields of Flanders.

In Berlin there were rumours of terrible things, but the telegrams were suppressed; the nation was not allowed to know. For a week no casualty lists had been published. There were whispers of cruel sacrifices which the fight for the crossing of the Yser, three times attempted in vain, must have cost. Dozens of military trains went from east to west: reinforcements from the east formed reserve corps brought up to undertake the terrible venture for the fourth time, for his Majesty had commanded the capture of Calais and Boulogne by a certain date.

The regiments of the Guards from Potsdam and Berlin, the élite of the Prussian army, were to perform the wonder . . . and the North Sea was ready to receive them.

Losses still more frightful might be expected, and therefore the train, crammed with nurses, sisters, and doctors under Wilhelmi's orders, was hastening from east to west, scarcely stopping at any station. . . .

Outside darkened the night of early winter. In the corner-seat of a first-class compartment sat *Wilhelmi*: the man with the strong, quiet face of a student, who in his Berlin clinique had restored hundreds to life.

Over his head in the luggage-rack lay his small leather case, containing the instruments that begin to live in the hands of a master and become instruments of miracle: the knives, the bone-saws, the forceps, the probes, straight and curved, with which the surgeon explores the secrets of wounds, and the sterilised bandages with which he wards off tetanus.

Wilhelmi could not sleep. Since he became Director of the Surgical Clinique, in all these long seventeen years, and as assistant of famous surgeons at Bonn and Breslau, he had seen much that was horrible; but what was awaiting him now on the battle-fields of Flanders?

On the occasion of a great railway accident, years ago, near Breslau, he was one of the first on the spot. Once in the Ruhr District, when a thunder-storm wrecked a village, he attended the sufferers who were carried out of their ruined cottages.

But what was a railway accident, what was a thunder-storm, in comparison with the work of the field-artillery, the guns of the British dreadnoughts, the French seventy-fives? What was that compared with what he was going to see in this once beautiful land, on whose wide plains the wounded and maimed of his people lay in thousands? Six months ago *Wilhelmi* thought that he, as Director of the Berlin Clinique, had gauged the depth of human misery . . . and now, what was coming now? . . .

Borne across the North German plains, he re-

called the lectures which not long ago he gave in the principal towns of the Empire and abroad. In these lectures he had spoken of the insurance of workmen against accidents, of measures that might be taken to regulate the conditions of labour in factories, in mines, and on railways; of the provision of radium to cure cancer, of the erection of sanatoria for tuberculosis. Now, he told himself, all his strenuous efforts to alleviate the suffering of humanity were useless and ridiculous.

What did they signify to-day, these workmen, these cancer patients, these consumptives for whom he had exerted himself, to whom he had devoted his life and his studies?

What did they signify compared with the thousands lying on the plains of Flanders and Poland, in the trenches, in the armoured forts, on the sea-banks, spending their blood, wasting their lives? Hundreds of thousands of healthy, powerful young men, who had no need of radium in order to prolong a morbid life for a couple of months; the flower of the nations, from whom future generations, strong and beautiful, ought to have sprung, were pouring out their life-blood as a libation to all-devouring death, and their substitutes were the aged, and the crippled, and the sick.

The flower of the nations, be they German, French, British, Belgian, Russian, they had been mowed down inexorably by the machinery of death, invented by profit-mongers; and none could take their place. The Negro, the Indian, the Turco, the Spahi, whom Britain and France had called into this war as comrades, all were fodder for these gigantic engines of destruction, which, with mathematical accuracy, showered their projectiles of death indiscriminately on the painter

who had enchanted the world with his art, on the poet from whose lyrics thousands had derived joy, on the thinker who had searched after truth to the depths, on the doctor who had healed thousands, on the preacher who had helped hundreds to scale the heights of the soul. And were they the only victims ?

What of the others, who, maimed and sick, crept back to their homes, renouncing love, refusing to reproduce their weakness, to be the authors of a new generation, that would become the future curse and misfortune of the countries of Europe ? Wilhelmi saw them before his eyes as he sped through the night to the battle-fields of Flanders. He looked away from the vision.

His eye fell on the face of the court-preacher who was sitting opposite him asleep. Wilhelmi lifted his fine student's head with an involuntary movement of scorn. How was it possible ? That self-satisfied fool with his title of court-preacher ! Wilhelmi was a confirmed materialist. His saints were Darwin, who belonged to a nation one was now commanded to hate, Pasteur, who taught a doctrine that some anathematised. He had laboured in a difficult profession, had done what seemed to him right, and had not questioned about the things of faith and the hereafter. Strange thoughts came to him as he looked at the man opposite reposing on the luxurious cushions of the compartment. What was theology—most elastic of all ideas ? He, a medical man, had never quite understood theology, with his physiologist's brain ; now he could not understand it at all. . . .

It had executed a *volte-face*, this Protestant theology, in the course of a couple of weeks, like a Prussian battalion whom the sergeant commands

“Right about face” ; it turned completely round ; of that the man who was sleeping opposite him was a living proof. Court-preacher, field-chaplain, and Heaven knew what beside ; Privy Councillor, theologian, who had been ordered to the front, who was travelling with him now in the ambulance train to encourage soldiers and officers.

He, like a conjurer, had changed the command of charity into that of hatred : “Ye have heard that it hath been said ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy,’ but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that ye may be the children of your Father in heaven.”

And this man there, stood up against his Lord and Saviour, and taught hatred. What kind of look would there be on his fat face if any begged a coat of him, this follower of the Rabbi of Nazareth, who taught His disciples to give their cloak also !

Wihelmi thought of the hills of Galilee on the Sea of Tiberias, where thousands fed on one wheaten loaf and two small fishes and listened to the words from the Teacher’s lips ; and this man. . . .

Was it a wonder ? Had not this arch-priest whose word every one believed, only a few weeks ago played baseball with the ethics and the moral laws of mankind ? Was not everything standing on its head ? Everything except himself and his profession ? Were not those of his profession the only ones who came to heal both foe and friend, to mitigate suffering, to do good, without questions ?

The train came to a stop. For one moment the court-preacher seemed about to wake, but no, he settled down again and placidly snored on. . . .

Three minutes' stop. . . . Scattered lights gleamed in the small station. . . . Soldiers, ambulance men with stretchers, were loading a returning train with the seriously wounded, for the hospitals in Brabant and Flanders had not been able for a long time to cope with the numbers of sick and wounded. All those who could possibly travel must go back to the interior of the Empire ; and how many would die on the journey ?

The ambulance train started afresh, and again began the monotonous screeching of the wheels and the puffing of the indefatigable engine. The plains and towns of Flanders and Brabant rose up before the excited mind of Wilhelmi. He and his wife were worshippers of art and beauty, lovers of the sea, and of the venerable streets through which the spirit of revolution and of liberty had walked under the rule of Spain.

How beautiful were those summer days by the still canals of Ghent and Bruges ; the gabled houses and rows of elms reflecting themselves in the quiet waters, where the centuries seemed to have arrested their course before the town-halls and the churches, the cloth-halls and trade-halls, built by the laborious hands of the good citizens in their love and pride.

Wilhelmi shuddered. What were the sights to be seen in those once still and beautiful towns, now ? And opposite snored the self-satisfied court-preacher ordered from Berlin to the front, for whom war and death and hatred and the hereafter held no secret, to whom the Word was the Word, and nothing but the Word.

Outside dawn descended. Was it possible that they were already in Aix-la-Chapelle and near the frontier ?

CHAPTER II

ALL COWARDICE EXTINGUISHED

BRABANT and Flanders ; the land of Egmont and Rubens ; the cradle of the humanities which saved the world from the claws of Rome and from the jaws of sombre Philip ; guardian of civic liberty.

The express with Wilhelmi's ambulance left the frontier station filled with soldiers, who like those in Aix-la-Chapelle were being sent as reserves to the Front at Ypres. . . . Liège, the unshakable, with its coal districts, came in sight. There were the fallen fortresses. The white flag still waved on the one that had held out till the last, which buried under its ruins a crowd of heroes, and the commander who was saved from the choking vapours to become a prisoner. Liège with the chimneys of its industrial districts in ruin in the engulfing mud, fled past : the land of the Walloons lay far behind the express.

Country of Rubens and Rembrandt ! Was it inevitable that you, of all countries, should be the battle-field of the most horrible of all wars ; that you should be drenched with blood ; that your elms and poplars should disappear, torn up from the beautiful earth ; that your canals, which breathed peace, should be stained with the red that all the waves of the ocean cannot wash away again ?

Melanie stood by a corridor window, pressing her hot forehead against the cool pane. The steam and soot from the engine had obscured the glass, so that she could scarcely distinguish the features of the country through which she was speeding. Her pitying heart divined more than her moistened eyes could see. Like Wilhelmi, she had known Brabant and Flanders in the days of peace, and she loved the country where the bright air, keen with the scent of the sea, throbs with a light and beauty unique in Europe.

Melanie had taken the final decision to leave home and husband ; to labour in the service of the Red Cross and forget everything ; to do good wherever she might, be it to friend or foe—a difference that did not exist any longer for her ; to work wherever sorrow and death were trying to forget the past.

In Koenigsberg and in Berlin she was sent from pillar to post. Everything was overcrowded. Women and girls, many of them, alas, only following the fashion of the day, crowded everywhere to the work of Charity, in the midst of a world of enmity and hatred. Ten times she was refused, but she insisted until she succeeded. Unshakable was her decision, and she had an iron will when once she had decided to do a thing which she considered right. To become the servant of Charity in the country of the enemy if possible, in Belgium which she loved with longing heart ; that was what she desired.

The offices of the Red Cross, the headquarters of the various Associations, founded and conducted by women, in Koenigsberg and Berlin, were crowded by people who all had the same desire as herself, and yet not the same. She desired to

serve, to help those who were tired and heavy-laden, as He said, who was a foe to this war and to all wars. She was not there to hate with the others, but to love with them. . . . Would she succeed at the last moment ?

She did succeed at the last, at the very last moment. . . . The Baroness of Weitzenstein, the widow of a general, who considered the work of Charity as created by God especially for herself, sent her to professor Wilhelmi, who she knew was preparing an ambulance for Belgium, and would travel to the front in Flanders within the next few days.

To him Melanie von Berkersburg poured out her distress, to him she confided the warmest wish of her heart: to be able to serve in the midst of danger and death, to help the poorest of the poor in Belgium. She did not conceal her feelings from this man in whom she felt implicit confidence as soon as she saw him.

Contrary to all expectations, the very busy man received her in his consulting-room at his private house in the Voss Strasse in Berlin. She would never forget the hour during which she talked to him and unveiled to him her heart, trembling with sorrow and pain, while the noise from the Leipziger Strasse came into the quiet room like the sound of the surf of some remote sea.

And what a room ! Its arrangements revealed the great and noble judge of souls, the enthusiastic admirer of art, the friend of mankind. National differences, national contrasts, seemed not to exist for him. For him only mankind existed, only the suffering, whose sicknesses and woes must be healed and soothed.

On the wall of his room hung the " Lesson in

Anatomy" of the great Rembrandt of Amsterdam, next to the English picture "The Doctor," that touching scene in which the skilful man bends down to the child suffering from fever. There hung the splendid Gabriel Max, "Jesus healing a Sick Infant," from the Berlin National Gallery, next to a work of art from the Louvre which she had admired in the days of long ago, when she was in Paris with her friend. There, too, was the "Vivisector," the grand figure of the woman who saves the little dog at her bosom from the knife of the physiologist; in her hand the balance, of which one scale, containing the flaming heart of Charity, sinks deeper and deeper, while the other side, with the brain wreathed in laurel, the cold, calculating brain, rises higher and higher.

Wilhelmi was an apostle of truth, of charity, and of beauty. She could feel it by the copy of "The Anatomist" that also decorated his room. In that picture the old doctor bends over the corpse of the young girl, which, undraped, rests on the operating-table in its glorious beauty, and hesitates to use the knife, to enter into the deepest secrets of nature and its mysteries, because the only road towards the desired aim leads through destruction of beauty.

Melanie became convinced of Wilhelmi's goodness and greatness, and when at last he entered, her first glance assured her that she had not deceived herself. He remained, he could but remain himself even in these days, even in these horrible days when everything had broken the bonds of civilisation and culture; that culture which at best was only a cheap varnish, nothing more. Brabant and Flanders, through whose ruins she now passed, taught her this.

He remained the same; the friend of mankind,

the convinced pacifist who had himself been in intimate correspondence with Nobel, who put Bertha von Suttner's works above all others, in whose many articles and popular books she had learned to see the same man. He was now speeding towards the Flanders front to bring consolation, in order to sprinkle balm in burning wounds, he who remained the same when millions around him had gone mad, when millions had called out their "Crucify him! crucify him!" with the same fanaticism and hatred as sounded through the streets of Jerusalem two thousand years ago.

Brabant and Flanders, that was where she would go—there, where sufferings had been greatest, where most had been sacrificed; Brabant and Flanders, which she loved.

In simple words, with burning cheeks and trembling voice, she revealed the wish of her heart. She told him the story of her marriage and her sorrows, and he did not interrupt her impatiently, but listened to her full of sympathy to the end. Then he looked at her with his clear, penetrating eyes, and said:

"Do you understand what you are asking?"

And she answered, with the same simplicity:

"Yes, I do know, professor."

At first he shook his head and returned:

"No, you do not know it. Time after time here in my clinique I have seen tested, tried, and stolid nurses faint away during an operation."

"I can quite understand that, professor," she answered. He went on:

"The military hospital close to the front is not a clinique. I, myself, do not know what is awaiting me, I do not know whether I can trust my nerves when the thunder of cannon is at the doors, when

the bombs and shrapnel are flying over the roof on which waves the flag of the Red Cross."

"Oh you will be able to rely on your nerves, professor," she answered, full of confidence.

He smiled.

"I hope so, madam; but you, a spoilt society lady?"

Melanie cast down her eyes, but said in a firm tone:

"I shall be able to conquer everything, professor. I shall be able to conquer everything, because I will it, and because I must, because I love Flanders and Brabant, and because I want to bring help to those out there."

Again he objected.

"In modern war, my dear lady, it is quite possible that in one hour hundreds of seriously wounded will be brought to my operating-room. Will you be able to stand the screams of these hundreds? Will you be able to single out those that may be operated on from those who are dying, and whom I cannot help any more?"

"I shall be able to do it, professor."

"It may occur that I shall have to operate without chloroform. It may occur that the number of operations which I have to execute in a moment will exhaust the quantity of anæsthetics sooner than I think; that out there on the field the reserve will be lacking; that I must cut into living bodies conscious of their pain and agony. Would you be able to stand that, madam?"

"I shall remind myself that you torture in order to be able to help, and I shall stand it as long as you can stand it, professor, because I want to help."

He got up.

"Very well," he said; "*au revoir*, madam. Go this afternoon at four o'clock to my clinique in the Zeisel Strasse, and ask the matron for the uniform of a Red Cross nurse. Here is my card and a couple of words, that is sufficient."

He was already at the door. He had given her much of his valuable time though dozens were waiting to see him.

"To-morrow morning, at 8.30, I start with the ambulance from Potsdam Station."

"Very well, 8.30, professor." She gave him her hand, and he pressed it cordially.

From this hour her name was nurse Irene, the name of the goddess of Peace, and now she was in the same train as he, going to Brabant and Flanders to try to be worthy of him.

CHAPTER III

IN THE CITY BY THE FAIR STREAM

“BRUSSELS, city of elegance and grace, the second Paris, looks now like a military camp,” thought nurse Irene, as she left the station by Wilhelmi’s side and walked across the great Boulevard towards the Exchange. Black and white, and black, white, and red flags flapping, helmets and grey overcoats covering the pavements, regimental music with its drums and bugles at the head of marching troops.

In deep thought nurse Irene went by the side of the professor along the street once full of laughing and hurrying people. Most of the shops were closed. The cafés, whose marble tables once stood close to the street, were empty. No busy men in top-hats were discussing the state of the market before the exchange; for Belgium and its capital there was no market any longer.

The King and his army had escaped from the girdle of fortresses around Antwerp, and were fighting now side by side with the French and the British on the coast, near Ypres, on the Yser. Foreigners were masters in the town. Rattle of drums, blare of bugles. The guard was marching up to the Town Hall and the Grande Place, before the palace of the exiled King, before the Palais de Justice, parading the town.

“Justice! Justice!” was the inward cry of nurse Irene, as she and Wilhelmi followed the guard up to the terrace where stood the building admired by the world. The cannon of the conquerors glared at her from the terrace; their mouths were trained on the town and on the wide, once smiling plains of Brabant; but now they were silent, although ready to fire, these cannon of the conquerors.

Nurse Irene shuddered at her thoughts, but she could not say a word; she could not venture to express them to Wilhelmi, and the great surgeon also was silent at the sight. Silent in sorrow. Vengeance upon Brussels. . . . As once upon Rosey, as upon East Prussia. . . . Everywhere the same heart-rending picture.

In front of the Palais de Justice stood a German sentinel, a youthful infantryman in Bavarian uniform. A kind and good soul from Possenhofen, at Starnberg Lake, who had not the slightest notion where he really was, and why he was standing there. He smiled all over his face when he saw the lady in the uniform of the German Red Cross, and the gentleman in top-hat and well-cut overcoat, who must be a civilian surgeon. He thought of nothing more.

Wilhelmi took out his cigar-case and handed a Havana to the boy. Then he considered a moment. . . . He remembered the instructions received at Munich in the barracks and on the Marsfeld, that a sentinel is not allowed to speak to anybody or to accept gifts; but here in Brussels, in the field? That was different, and notwithstanding the many efforts of charity which were written of daily in the German newspapers, cigars for individual soldiers were rare. What are a couple of hundred

thousand cigars when millions of men on the field want to smoke ?

With an enthusiastic "God bless you," the Possenhofer put the cigar between the buttons of his light blue uniform and continued to walk up and down, rifle on shoulder. He did not bother about the gentleman and lady any further. She was a German Red Cross nurse and he was a doctor ; that was sufficient. Moreover, the band heralding the changing of the guard could be heard quite near, and that was the principal thing the young infantryman thought of.

Wilhelmi and nurse Irene went to the border of the terrace. The sun blazed in the clear sky. Brussels the incomparable was at their feet, exulted over by the flags of the conqueror ; the King and his Consort, exiled ; the people reduced to hunger and penury ; the army, fighting despairingly, with the courage of lions, until the last man lay yonder near the yellow waves of the Yser. Nurse Irene's eye wandered over the panorama of the town ; a wide extent of houses at her feet, a town of glamour, luxury, and joy, whose equal was not to be found in the wide countries of Europe, which could be compared only to Paris. And now !

She laid her hand on the balustrade to support herself, clenching the stone. Wilhelmi saw how much she was moved.

"What is the matter, madam ? you are crying already ?"

"Had it to be ?" she exclaimed. "What is your opinion, professor ?"

He replied, "I have no longer any opinion, madam."

"If you have no opinion, who in the world could have one, professor ?"

"Nobody in these times."

"Nobody; you are right; nobody."

She smiled, almost with contempt. Wilhelmi observed it.

"You smile, madam?"

"I was thinking of the heroes, professor; those who consider themselves such, and who are merely slaves."

"What do you mean, 'slaves'?"

"Slaves of an opinion that has been forced upon them."

"Well, you may be right, madam."

Long nurse Irene's sorrowful eyes gazed upon the town at her feet. At last she turned to Wilhelmi, saying:

"Let us go back, professor. I think we have seen everything here."

"Do you know of whom I am thinking?" she asked, as they returned.

"Well, of whom, madam?"

"Of Goethe."

"Goethe? Why Goethe?"

"Because he wrote of Brussels and its history in two immortal books of poetry."

"You are right. I had not recalled that."

"At every step I thought of the soldiers walking with sombre faces through this street before the hour of liberty struck for the Netherlands: of Goethe, Egmont, and Claerchen. Claerchen, who was going to head a crowd of citizens to release him from jail. 'O Claerchen, wert thou a man? . . . Then I should thank thee for what it is so hard to thank a king for . . . liberty.'"

"Oh, but that is fancy, liberty, my dear madam. Liberty in these days, when murderers are speaking, when only might can settle the result."

"Oh, let me have my fancies, professor. The faith of Egmont gives me my sole consolation here in Brussels."

"What faith do you mean?"

"The faith with which Egmont went to the scaffold, professor: 'I also go to an honourable death. I am going to die for liberty, for which I lived and fought, and to which I offer myself now as a victim.' Brussels and Egmont and Beethoven, who created the music of liberty, or the work of Goethe, they are all inseparable ideas to me."

"You are right. A thing, a man, a place only becomes holy to us when the man who consecrated it, and who was one of the elect of mankind, dies, and that which such a man consecrated one should never attack, because henceforth it is one of the ideals of mankind. You are right. Only now I realise the real source of my sorrow, now that you have drawn my attention to it. . . . Brussels and Goethe, inseparable ideas since the first performance of Egmont. Oh, how right you are!"

Nurse Irene was silent. She was very happy that the man by her side, to whom she was to give her labour in the future, could feel in the same way.

At last she spoke again of Brussels, vanquished and waiting for the hour of delivery, and she quoted Goethe again:

"Since when is Egmont thus alone—so utterly alone in this wide world? Doubt deadens all feeling in thee, not happiness. What is the king's justice, in which during thy whole life, thou hast so implicitly confided, is the Regent's friendship which, thou mayst confess it, almost bordered on love itself—are these gone, vanished on a sudden, like a fiery meteor of the night? Have they left thee alone on thy gloomy journey? Will not

Orange lead on thy friends to the rescue? Will not the people muster, and with gathering tide of power deliver their old friend?

"Ye walls, which shut me in, oh! shut not out from me the well-meant zeal of so many ardent spirits! And may the inspiration of valour, which my glance was wont to kindle in them, now return, reflected from their brave hearts, on mine! Yes, they are gathering in my vials! They come! They stand beside me! With earnest prayer they beseech Heaven, and ask a miracle; and if no angel sweep down for my deliverance, I see them seize their spears and swords! The gates are cleft open, the bolts are driven in, the walls yield to their blows, and Egmont steps forth to hail in joyfulness the freedom of the dawn of day."

The nurse's cheeks flushed; the recital of Egmont's soliloquy filled her with enthusiasm.

"No, Brussels must not go down. It must have back its liberty, professor, since Goethe has consecrated it."

Wilhelmi sadly shook his head.

"I am a physiologist and a materialist," he said, after musing a while, "yet I see that the course of universal history is destruction. I do not know what may be the future of Brussels. The ancients had a beautiful way out: the Moira, my dear lady. Troy fell, and Carthage, Rome, and Byzantium."

"Rome is eternal!"

"In one sense, yes. 'What shall live for ever in song, must die in our life-time,' says the consoling word of a great poet."

Wilhelmi stood still for a moment.

"'What is truth?' asked Pilate; and I ask you, what is eternal in the course of universal history?"

CHAPTER IV

THE CITY DOLOROUS

UNTIL it reached Brussels, the rush of the express which was to take Wilhelmi's ambulance into the battle-field of Flanders was unstayed, but in the conquered capital there was delay. The tremendous military transports moving from east to west hindered the ambulance train. Fresh supplies were needed for the trenches; so the wounded must wait for the doctors, the dying for the hand that will relieve them.

Wilhelmi visited the German military and civil governor; prayed to be allowed to go on as quickly as possible; but the train that took him and his ambulance travelled only a few miles farther on. There it was stopped until the wagons full of young, freshly trained material should pass, that the billows of the Atlantic, the waves of the North Sea, the guns of the British dreadnoughts, the French artillery, might be fed. Nurse Irene had hoped that this suffering might be spared her, but she was obliged to see and hear the realisation of the thought which had been with her during the whole of the journey.

Near the still waters of the Dyle there was once a town, as beautiful as any in the land of Brabant. Famous for her culture, she was consecrated by history and the procession of ages, which passed

over her venerable head without being able to destroy her. She was the ornament of South Brabant. Dreaming canals, shadowed by elms and poplars, which connect Dyle and Rupel, reflected the gabled roofs, and told of days gone by, when the councillor in his velvet robe lined with ermine walked into the wonderful city-hall, to discuss with his colleagues the destiny of Louvain. In the dark mirror of their waters the beauties of the town admired themselves, well pleased with their fair plaits and with the sleeves of the new gown, as they went to St. Peter's Church to Mass in the quiet morning hours.

World-renowned professors here discussed and solved to their satisfaction the problems of the beginning and the end of the world; for the University of Louvain could be compared with those of Bologna and Padua, and was the most famous in the Netherlands when the wars of Louis XIV ravaged Germany; in Luther's epoch, perhaps the most famous in the world. This town, now, as Irene reflected bitterly, destroyed for ever, could look back on a thousand-years' history. She was great even before the book of history unrolled, when the forest spread far and wide, and the fisher-huts of the Wends stood on the future site of Berlin.

In the fourteenth century she was the cradle of the Counts of Brabant. It was then that the industry of the guilds made her what she has been in the course of centuries for the Netherlands, for Europe, and for the world: Louvain the treasure-casket, Louvain the graceful, the symbol of an art that can only live beneath this sky, where the light of the ocean mingles with that of the wide green plains—light that created the colours of

Rubens and Rembrandt, Vandyck and James Maris, a light such as can be seen nowhere else.

Quite alone, nurse Irene walked through the ruins of the town ; she had known that the sight would be heart-breaking, but she had not expected that it would be so frightful. How frightful ! Blackened and tottering walls, ruins and ashes wherever she looked !

Was it of much avail that, at the last moment, they came to their senses and saved the jewel of Gothic architecture, the Town Hall, from the flames ? Did not this jewel once stand there, the crown of the great square, that typified the spirit of the Middle Ages ? Did it not stand now in the midst of a heap of ruins ? Was it not more terrible now, its beauty appealing to Heaven, than if it had entirely disappeared from this blood-soiled earth ? Were not the university and library of Louvain in ruin ? Did not the rents in the walls of St. Peter, rents produced by German bombs, cry out to God ? Notwithstanding all assurances to the contrary given in a momentary impulse of shame, was not Louvain now merely a name, a mere trace of what it had been ?

With burning eyes nurse Irene beheld the square before the town hall, that seemed to gaze at her in its helplessness as if with large childlike eyes which, tearless and full of terror, did not understand what devil had been walking across the earth.

Ruins and ashes. Nothing but ruins and ashes wherever she looked. How thankful she was that she had not witnessed that terrible night when madness and misunderstanding brought about what would have seemed impossible ; when soldiers shot at soldiers, citizens at citizens, until

the sea of flames swallowed up Louvain the incomparable, until the bombs of the Germans turned into smoke in a few hours all that Flemish art, pious and industrious, had built up centuries ago.

Ruined were those streets to which peace gave its characteristic stamp, in which civic industry and civic virtue reared one noble mansion by the side of another, each a symbol of prosperity and comfort, of civic calm and security. And were those ruins the worst ?

Nurse Irene shuddered. She shuddered, remembering all she had read about Louvain when she was at Falkenstein, during the weeks of the dying summer. Those stones were still stained with the blood of the citizens. Full of horror, she could hear the weeping of the women, the plaintive prayers and sobs of the children. Who could have foretold this to the citizens of Louvain only half a year ago, when the security of their town, the safety of their country, seemed to be impregnable as a rock ?

Were they guilty, these citizens, these descendants of students and merchants, of artisans and manufacturers, whose work once made its influence felt in the ports of the farthest seas ; who sent their wares from Brabant through the lands of all the earth, from fair to fair ? For centuries these merchants had come to Frankfort-on-the-Main to attend the fairs which called half Europe to the great town. Did their city deserve to fly up in flames and go down in ashes, because one of them might have been guilty ?

Nurse Irene did not venture to pass sentence. War is war, and in war every one is right. Every one ? Ah, after all, only the more powerful, the aggressor, the man who assumes a right to triumph

over the weaker. And if the weaker defends his right? After all, war and right, are they not two ideas, the one absolutely excluding the other? When might tramples upon right, as was explained officially in Berlin, is there after all any right? If so, who was right and who was wrong? Nurse Irene did not venture to decide. She did not wish to decide. She was only a woman who had come to help, and that is why she wept over the destruction of the beautiful town.

The communiqués contradicted each other, like all the communiqués in this horrible war, which a devil called forth, and the responsibility for which he laid upon the shoulders of others. An attack had been planned and had been suppressed, the one said. The soldiers had made a mistake and shot their own comrades, said the others. Who, after all these weeks, could decide what had really happened in a dark night of despair and terror? Who had the courage to hurl upon the entire city the doom of destruction, and to condemn a population of thousands? Who had the heart? Who dared such an indictment? Not she. It was hers to seek whom she could heal, whom she could help, be it friend or foe, whichever accident threw into her path. Could she judge here? "Judge not, that ye be not judged." The words echoed through the great square of Louvain, and through her heart.

She looked up to the pitiless sky and tried to dry her tears. Still she tortured herself with thoughts. What was all she had seen of suffering along the road to Liège and Brussels compared with the misery of this town? Here was a victim, an innocent victim of murder, whose only crime was beauty and art. A lamb dumb before the

shearer ; a calf dragged without any comprehension to the shambles : that was Louvain to her.

Louvain ! Louvain ! Louvain ! Like a cry of torture, the unforgettable name is as immortal as Troy. Lovely Louvain, with the crown of thorns on your head, you who once wore the fairest crown of all Belgium's cities ! . . .

One night, accursed by God, the arch-devil changed men into mad wolves, who in raving fury fell upon each other, until the red flames roared up from church and hall, until consecrated column and antique parchment were shrivelled and shattered. From one pole to the other sounded the dirge, "Louvain is fallen." She is now only a name in History's golden book, she who was like an illuminated page of Upsala's silver codex, or the pictured songs treasured in the castle of Heidelberg.

Louvain and Heidelberg castle. Had any German the right ever to point again with tearful eye and clenched fist to the inclines of the Odenwald, to the castle that once fell into ruins there, after the destruction of Louvain by German hands ? Again nurse Irene looked up. Now she had decided. No. No such right existed any longer—now that Louvain the lovely had fallen in ashes and ruin.

CHAPTER V

ON THE WILD, DEEP-SUNKEN ROAD

THE field-hospital of Wilhelmi was established. It was quite near the front, where the wide green plain of Flanders, chequered with canals, touches the yellow dunes that stretch their arms longingly towards the steel-blue sea, around Ypres and the passage of the Yser. Battle was raging. The iron will of one solitary man had built there a wall of soldiers, decided to make the impossible possible, and to stretch his iron fist from Calais across the Channel: but a stern will and a relentless command are of no avail when the sea itself is the enemy's ally.

Nurse Irene passed many solitary hours in the field-hospital that was still waiting for the wounded. It was a long, one-storied barrack of corrugated iron, erected on the top of the dune, where the wind of the North Sea, the sharp autumn wind, blew with full cheeks, making the frail building, in hours of storm, creak in every joint.

Until the arrival of the wounded, nurse Irene had plenty of leisure; she was able to finish the diary of her Belgian journey, the terrible indictment that she wished to hurl in the impudent face of a degenerate and ungodly century. Many pages were covered with her graceful writing, whose firm lines showed no trace of the deep

emotion of the writer. Again her pen sped over the paper to the accompaniment of the thunder of the cannon.

“ANTWERP—AN ADMONITION

“Fly, sons and daughters of Flanders and Brabant ! Behold the day comes when the Lord remembers the hours passed in voluptuousness and the gathering of gold. Behold your Lord has come on the wings of the storm, while you slumbered on your piles of gold. Then the Lord called up the evil foe, that he might build machines driven by the fire of hell through the shuddering air. Look for them, sons and daughters of Flanders, you who boasted the girdle of steel around your city, and knew not of the revenge that was lying in wait on the couch of peace. It was hypocrisy and secret malice that strewed the roses and lilies at the banquet. Beware, sons and daughters of Flanders ; your turrets of steel will crumble. Near is the Day of the Lord, and terrible is His work. “Impregnable, irreducible,” the vain spirits of pride and vanity whispered into your ears ; but the angel of wrath moves before the foe with flaming sword, his eyes like lightning and his voice like thunder.

“Look for him, sons and daughters of Flanders and Brabant. He will come from the south in the direction of the midday sun, with winged shoes on his feet and the flaming two-edged sword of the lie in his unhallowed hand. He will wither you like the wind of Arctic Sea, and will fall upon your cities as a wolf on the sleeping flock.

“Hear you nothing, sons and daughters of Flanders and Brabant ? In the moonless, starless sky hovers the terrible bird of prey from the abyss,

beating his rustling wings, bearing pitch and sulphur, fire and plague, in his body.

“There is a glare of light in the dark night; the hissing of fire on the pillars of your palaces. What globes of fire, like thunderbolts, fall from the bird’s iron claws !

“The bird of hell is above your heads in the sky. May the Lord save you, sons and daughters of Flanders. Your country is left unto you desolate. . . .”

Here the day-book of nurse Irene breaks off suddenly. It was found, nearly destroyed by water, in the hospital building, after the troops had escaped from the flood of the North Sea. During the hour in which she wrote this, the first motor-cars with the wounded from Ypres and the Yser Canal must have arrived at professor Wilhelmi’s field-hospital.

CHAPTER VI

LEAD ONWARD THEN

THE thunder of the cannon at Ypres rose to the ridge of the dunes. For months now the thunder had not ceased, for the battle in Flanders was endless. Like two mad dogs the opponents kept hold of each other; neither will give way, neither retires one step; breast to breast, they fight on. The country was soaked in blood; thousands of wounded, heaps of corpses covered the green plains. Piled in the canals, they caused the crimson water to overrun its banks; but there was no retreat. The number of fallen mounted up, but the word of the One goaded them on again like tigers in the arena. "Calais and Dunkirk must be taken; shall be taken. . . ." It was of no avail.

Calais and Dunkirk must be taken so that he might stretch his mailed fist across the Channel towards Britain. The strength of Germany lay bleeding to death. What matter! Calais and Dunkirk must fall. Wretched Ypres, between the Lyss and the Yser, formed the centre of these horrible fights, the like of which the history of the universe had never yet seen; a mad scheme which had already cost the Chief of the German General Staff his head.

Three attempts had been made, and on one

Sunday in November the thunder of the heavy cannon round Ypres again began. Each boom startled anew the listening ear of nurse Irene. Some asserted that the senses became accustomed to the sound of the cannon; but she was never accustomed to it. She listened trembling for each reiteration, and the fear which filled her heart increased from moment to moment.

Ypres was enduring for the fourth time the fire of the enemy artillery. The way across the Yser must be forced at any cost. Poor ruined Ypres! Why did you lie on the road of the imperial incendiary of the universe? Would he not trample you down as he trampled down Flanders and Brabant and their flourishing villages and cities? As he wills to trample down all who come in his way?

Round Ypres stretched mile upon mile of trenches, like the confusing burrows of the mole, through the green plains of Flanders, and on towards the yellow dunes by the sea. They had already reached Dixmude and Nieuport. The inmates of these structures did not suspect that the ocean was prepared to receive them into the foaming, icy grave of eternal silence. They were like a cancer that had fastened on the flourishing body of the Flemish plains, those trenches; a creeping worm of death, gnawing at the sturdy wood that ought to live for ever.

But the waves of the sea none can compel: they cannot be commanded by the stern obstinacy of one who believes that he has the right to order myriads to play ball with their lives. They obey only the command of the Eternal and the Unfathomable, He who guided the people of Israel through the waves of the Red Sea and overwhelmed

the Egyptians. These trenches made by the sappers in the body of Flanders were dwellings, cottages, houses; this cancer would gnaw on farther and farther, like a horrible sickness in the body of man, if it were not stopped with a sharp stroke. And One was waiting to command the ocean to take into its green arms the country which it destroyed and loved at the same time . . . the last deliverance from Heaven—the waves of the North Sea. . . .

Nurse Irene went out of the hospital, and stood in her uniform, bare-headed, on the ridge of the dune, looking towards the town of which she could distinctly see the houses and spires, and over which hung the smoke of the battle.

The thunderstorm raged in the sky; the storm created by the callous brain of one man out of ambition, in sin, shame, and disgrace; the storm born from misguided intelligence and dismal hatred of mankind. Not a thunderstorm such as the mild west wind sends in summer-time across the meadows of Flanders, thirsting for the refreshing rain; a thunderstorm which the Prince of Hell designed in the circle of his confidants and tools—his tools, and naught else.

From the western sea rose the wind. It seized nurse Irene's hair. It blew the sand in her eyes so that she could not see. It blew the flames and smoke till they looked like mad meteors joining in some infernal dance. They darted about like the birds in the daffodil meadows of the departed. The castle bell clashed out, mingling with the thunder of the cannon. Nurse Irene could clearly hear the ominous sound when, for a moment, the artillery was silent. . . . Ypres was in flames, for the fourth time.

The dusk of early autumn evening rose slowly up to the ridge of the dune, and far away the surf murmured against the coast, as if it said, "I am coming; I will take you in my arms. . . . Wait. . . . Wait. . . . I am coming; I am coming. . . . Have patience. . . . Have patience!"

Purple shadows crept over the horizon, the sky became darker and darker. Neither moon nor star could be seen, only the flames of destruction. Ypres was destroyed.

Nurse Irene gazed westwards, where a sea of vapour and smoke, of fire and flame, was rolling up, as if it were a picture from an incomprehensible chapter of the Apocalypse imaging the terror of the final Judgment.

She uttered an exclamation. The castle tower, hundreds of years old, whose bell in the Middle Ages called the citizens of Ypres to the fight, and in the times of liberty and peace proclaimed the hours of leisure and labour, was blown up. The bell whose steel tongue had spoken to generations fell and ran in molten liquid. Millions of sparks were tossed in air where the tower had stood, as if Zeus from the heights of Olympus gave the sign of the doom of mankind.

Nurse Irene wrung her hands like one in despair. Whipped up by the storm, a column of sand moved in front of her. In this shape the God of Wrath showed His elected people the way through the desert. Was the God of Wrath once more moving before Ypres? . . . Beside herself with grief and horror, which yet held in them a certain ecstasy, she began to sing. Like a wild Deborah she sang, while the storm howled, and the cannon thundered an accompaniment.

"Be comforted, daughters of Ypres, with your

plaited golden hair, you who sat at your doors or behind the small-paned windows in the high-gabled houses of the Market-place. You bent your heads, daughters of Ypres, over the lace on the soft velvet pillow, which your slender hands could weave like no others in the whole of Flanders. . . .

“What was it that you wove in the bridal robes, fine as gossamer, in the ancient gabled houses on the Market-place, when hour after hour you worked serenely in the peaceful town?”

“Were they not thoughts of faith and love that you wove into bridal veil and robe, pure promise and unbroken pledge? Love that endures, and faith that abides?”

“You have disappeared from my sight, daughters of Ypres. The walls of your houses are blackened and rent; the wind of night blows through the small windows; the stars of heaven gaze through your torn roofs.

“But your glories remain, and your industry remains, and your faith remains, fair daughters of Ypres, so long as one heart can throb against another.”

Dark clouds gathered above nurse Irene's head. They opened and let down the white pall of winter. Flakes fell—white, soft, large, cold flakes. The green plains of Flanders disappeared under the coverlet of snow.

CHAPTER VII

THESE SPIRITS HAVE NO HOPE

“MARCH! Quick march! Double! Charge!” cries the voice of the captain, hoarse from shouting; one of the hundred who, along the bank of the Yser, are giving the same mad command.

“March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

His bloodshot eyes, like those of a beast of prey, seem starting from their sockets. On his breast gleams the Iron Cross gained a couple of weeks ago. In his right hand he swings his sword; his left clutches a revolver, with which he is prepared to shoot down any of his own men who show a sign of turning tail; who, unlike the fool who has taken leave of his senses, hesitate to throw themselves into the rain of enemy bombs and shrapnel.

“March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

The crossing of the Yser must be attempted once again. Six regiments advance. Flags wave, bugles blare, drums rattle, loud cries and shouts resound as though from the throats of savages. It seems as though a troop of civilised men were changed quite suddenly into a herd of devils gone mad. One stumbles, another falls, till several are struggling on the ground.

“March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

The music should drown the crackling of infantry rifles, the thunder of artillery; the hurrahs should

drown the fearful screams of the dying. They should, but they cannot: the attempt is madness. The opposite bank is lined with cannon.

“March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

One has shouted himself dumb; the others have become voiceless; lieutenants, sub-lieutenants, sergeants take on the senseless command.

“March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

The men come from trenches in which they have been lying for weeks in water, numb with cold. They can hardly move: they make efforts to run.

“Quick march! Double! Charge!”

From above their heads falls the rain of fire; behind them is the man with bloodshot eyes, revolver in hand, and Iron Cross on breast.

“March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

The troops scamper across the field. Hundreds of cannon spit death into the masses. Thousands are mown down by the fiery missiles; the man with bloodshot eyes falls, revolver in hand. He lies a cipher amongst other ciphers in the middle of a heap of dead. Another, as frantic, yells:

“March! March! Quick march! Double! Charge!”

“Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!”

“For God! for King; for Fatherland!”

“With God! With God!”

Thousands of voices repeat it like a mocking echo.

“With God! With God!”

The roar of artillery that rolls through the plains of Flanders drowns the blasphemous cry.

“With God!”

Death reaps a colossal harvest in the rows of the advancing men. . . . The mower with the fleshless skull and the skeleton arms mows, mows, mows,

his newly sharpened scythe in his powerful hand.

"Lie down! Lie down! Lie down!"

This command passes from mouth to mouth, and seems to bring relief for a moment. The living sink heavily beside and over the bodies of their fallen brethren. . . .

The enemy artillery pauses. They are saving their ammunition until the order comes again: "Double march! Charge!" and the mad rush towards the waters of the canal again begins. The artillery is excellently served, it is screened by the dunes; but a small mirror shows the observing officer each movement of the enemy.

"Double quick march! Charge!"

Once more the columns come on, out of breath.

"Double quick march! Charge!"

The men with revolvers are behind them.

Shrapnel shrieks; the mortars on the other side of the canal roar like wild animals; like gulls whipped by the moaning wind of the sea; like a storm of hail in spring, the projectiles whistle and scream across the darkness of the sky.

"Double quick march! Charge!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

The men sing a terrible chorus of death; the last song of the doomed, "The Watch on the Rhine."

The charge begins for the sixth time, against a whirlwind of bombs.

"Lie down! . . . Lie down! . . ."

Only two-thirds of those who started can obey the command.

Like a cloud of locusts passing across the desert, they fall dead tired on the ground, moaning and sighing from breasts scarcely able to breathe, no longer able to feel the heavy knapsack, rifle and

bayonet in hand. They lie drawing difficult breath between dead and wounded, whose groans fill the air. They lie like the dead, where accident has thrown them, but they must drag themselves up again.

"Double quick march! Charge!" cry voices of their torturers, who seem to be steel.

"Double quick march! Charge!"

Bugles, drums, clarions, shake the air.

"Direction of the bridge! Charge."

There is one bridge left; one bridge which seems to have been forgotten by the enemy, in their haste, when they were fleeing.

The men have been looking at that bridge for days and weeks.

"Charge!"

The firing-line charges with frenzy. The enemy artillery is silent.

What is it? . . . Is it possible that they have no ammunition left on the other side?

The tattered colours flutter before them in the wind.

"The bridge! . . . The bridge!" . . . "The river! . . . The river!" . . .

Who will be the first to reach the other side? Who will be the first to grapple with the enemy, man against man, breast against breast?

"Charge!"

And as though driven by all the devils in hell, the exhausted men advance, caked with mud and dirt, so that they no longer look like human beings.

"Charge!" Honour! . . . Honour! . . . Honour! . . .

Word of madness! It goads them on. The silence of the enemy artillery seems to beckon them. They scramble along across the bodies of

their comrades, across the clumps of earth that dot the meadow, the hillocks marking the deserted trenches of the enemy. . . . They do not look about them. Forward! Only forward!

The cannon are still silent.

"Victory is ours!" "There is the canal!"
 "There is the bridge!" . . .

"Victory for God and Fatherland! . . ."

"With God! . . . With God! . . ."

"Hurrah! . . . Hurrah! . . . Hurrah! . . ."

"Like gathering thunder spreads a cry"

from hundreds and hundreds of throats. The first company has reached the bridge! . . .

"Hurrah!" . . .

The crossing of the Yser is accomplished! . . .

"It is ours."

The men press on to the bridge, and in a few minutes it is densely crowded, black with them as a pathway is thick with a swarm of ants.

"Hurrah! . . . Hurrah! . . . Hurrah! . . ."

"Like clash of arms when battle's nigh."

Hundreds swarm on the bridge, thousands are pressing behind.

"Hurrah! . . . Hurrah! . . . Hurrah! . . ."

The enemy artillery crashes out.

So, not silenced after all; not yet exhausted. . . .

Death mows! Death mows on the bridge! . . . The horses of officers struggle between the writhing bodies of soldiers; still the mass presses on. Suddenly, a hellish glare and a sound as of earthquake.

What is it? Has the sky burst open? Has the earth cleft asunder?

A shout of joy rises from thousands of throats on

the other side of the canal . . . the trick has succeeded. The bridge, mined for weeks, left standing for a trap, has been blown up. An immense cloud of yellowish vapour stretches across the stream; from his ambush springs the foe. Those behind, who do not realise what has happened, continue to push on across the broken arches of the bridge.

Thousands are struggling in the cold flood; thousands ready to die with exhaustion are re-animated by fear for their lives. The cannon are trained on the advancing masses; lines and columns fall before the discharge.

“Victoire ! Victoire !” From thousands on the other side comes the cry, “Victoire ! Victoire !”

Frantic arms are trying to grip the bank; wounded groan and yell, as if here one could get help by yelling ! Bayonets and rifle-butts descend on the frantic arms and desperate faces : the gripping hands are pierced, the raised heads beaten down. The carnage on the bank is frightful ; more frightful in the water. Man against man, with butt and bayonet.

The whole canal is a stream of blood, and still more come on, regiment after regiment. Weapons are sticky with blood and clogged with still warm flesh.

“Victoire ! . . . Victoire ! . . . Victoire ! . . .”

“Back ! . . . Back ! . . . Back ! . . .” at last comes hopelessly from some mouths, then from more ; at last from thousands is heard the despairing cry.

The stream of men ebbs away from the river.

“Back ! . . . Back ! . . . Back ! . . .” Across the corpses of comrades, the writhing bodies of comrades.

“Back! . . . Back! . . . Back! . . . Across the hill! . . .”

“Victoire! . . . Victoire! . . . Victoire! . . .”

The cannon pour a rain of death into the columns of the flying. . . .

A mass of bloody, writhing, mangled bodies of men wallows in agony and horror on the green plain. . . .

The charge across the Yser has failed—for the sixth time.

“Victoire! . . . Victoire! . . . Victoire! . . .”

The river, dammed by corpses of the fallen and drowned, rises blood-red above both banks, and floats one heap of dead after the other over the meadows.

“Victoire! . . . Victoire! . . . Victoire! . . .”

CHAPTER VIII

SHRIEKS OF WOE

THE ambulances moved across the battle-field.

Nurse Irene was bending over an unconscious man. He seemed scarcely twenty-five years old, and wore the uniform of a Belgian lieutenant. Her heart bled at the sight of his terrible injuries. A bomb, which had evidently exploded quite close to him, had torn away both legs. Happily he knew nothing. He lay there as though in deep slumber, and the rays of the setting sun played on his face of classic beauty. He was deadly pale; his marble lips were firmly closed. His hair and beard had not been tended for weeks, perhaps for months; in long dark strands they fell on his shoulders and breast. From the first moment nurse Irene had seen that suffering face it had arrested her attention. Why did it seem so strangely familiar?

Suddenly she remembered: it was Guido's Head of Christ.

She knelt before the wounded man; she had no eyes, no ears for the others lying wounded and crying for help. This wonderful face took possession of all her senses and thoughts: the Messiah on the battle-field of Flanders.

The body of the wounded man lay under the hedge where he had probably tried to find cover before the bomb exploded. Nurse Irene remained

motionless, gazing into the face of this strange man, forgetting the battle-field and all the horror of the past days.

At last she recalled her duty as nurse. Opening her medicine-case, she tried to revive him. All her efforts were in vain. Was life really gone? In order to give him more room to breathe, she unbuttoned his tunic. From an inner pocket fell out a pocket-book, which she opened. It contained a card which bore a name—

JOSUA DE KRUIZ,

DOCTEUR-ÈS-LETTRES

She was startled. She had before heard this name, but now for the first time it affected her singularly.

Josua: and with this unusual Christian name the surname of de Kruiz.

Josua. That was the same as Jesus, and de Kruiz, that was the Flemish for the English "Cross": Jesus of the Cross! and she, Irene, the angel of Peace!

She suddenly remembered that she had read the name of the most famous man in the whole of Belgium; that she was about to render the last assistance to a man who in spiritual importance was the first poet of his nation. Josua de Kruiz was leader of a school of young poets who sang the incomparable beauty of Brabant and Flanders. When the invaders fell upon his almost defenceless Fatherland he laid down the lyre to take up the sword, and carried the flag in the fore-front of danger. He who once celebrated his country in song offered his blood for her when the treacherous hyena sprang at her unguarded throat.

This was Josua de Kruiz, the poet.

"Shall I help you, nurse?"

Thomas, the hospital orderly, had come up. He jumped down from the Red Cross Ambulance, from the interior of which came the moans and cries of dying and wounded, and approached the hedge.

"Yes, help me, Thomas; but gently, gently. The man's unconscious, and I do not know whether he is not beyond help."

Irene spoke as if in deep grief. The hospital orderly, who was accustomed by this time to horrible sights, and to whom, after all, one seriously wounded man was no more important than another, looked at her full of astonishment; but he too was struck by the sight of the Belgian lieutenant. He also experienced a curious sensation, as if this were not an ordinary wounded man, one of the thousands of ciphers who cover the battle-field, but one quite distinct from the rest.

With nurse Irene's help he placed the unconscious Josua de Kruiz in the ambulance, already nearly full.

The ambulance must be taken to professor Wilhelmi's hospital; it was for him to decide what could be done for each.

They laid Josua de Kruiz by the side of an Indian whose uniform was soaked with blood. His right arm was shattered by shrapnel, but he was not insensible. His staring eyes glassy with pain and agony, the son of the Himalayas, brought by England's world power to the plains of Flanders, lay on the stretcher, but not a sound came from his lips, for the law of Vishnu the Eternal forbids the utterance of a complaint.

Nurse Irene eyed the dark-skinned man, whose spiritual value she was unable to gauge. She

looked on him as half a savage, like the Turks, the Spahis, the Gurkhas, the Cossacks, of whom terrible stories were told ; yet this man was not the same.

Did he know Josua de Kruiz, by whose side he was lying ? Had he sung of these Indians whom the Germans say England's greed has brought to death and destruction ? But his lips were dumb, his senses slept under the black pall of negation under the wings of death, from which he might rise if Wilhelmi could save him. Nurse Irene hoped it from the bottom of her heart, and, folding her hands as if in prayer, she glanced back from the Indian to the pale Christ-face.

The ambulance slowly moved on over the main road, and at last with difficulty the hill was surmounted and the ridge reached. Here was Wilhelmi, but already more than fully occupied. The ambulance containing Josua de Kruiz and the Indian was not the first, and would not be the last.

The eyes of all were directed towards him imploringly. Thousands of arms would have stretched themselves out for his help if they could—those powerless arms of strong men who yesterday were healthy and now maimed and crippled by the war, of which some said forsooth that it could not have been avoided !

The ambulance stopped at the entrance of the hospital. Two soldiers with white armlets assisted to unload it. The door of the operation-room was opened. Nurse Irene saw the professor in his overall, covered with blood, the knife in hand. The great surgeon looked like a butcher at work, she thought, shuddering.

Be strong ! Endure to the end, she said to herself half aloud.

"Nurse Erica, chloroform!" It was Wilhelmi's voice giving the order. Horrified, Nurse Irene heard her colleague answer:

"The chloroform is all used, professor."

She remembered the words he had spoken to her in his house at Berlin. "It may happen that I must operate without an anæsthetic. Can you stand that, madam?" And she had replied, "I can stand it, professor."

She would keep her word at the operating-table with the maimed body of Josua de Kruiz, as well as at the bed of agony. She pulled herself together. The cries of those inside the hospital, lying in the beds, on the chairs, on the floor, on the tables, pierced through her ears. Shrieks, wails, and moans; curses and prayers; roars as from an animal gone mad; screams that tear the nerves to pieces; cries for death to liberate the sufferers from the agonies of this hell, created by the declaration of war of one single man against the civilised world.

She glanced through the operating-room. It was a sea of misery and tears, in which stood Wilhelmi, a rock surrounded by the surf. He did not hesitate; he did not tremble; he was not moved. He went on doing his duty, as the assistants and nurses brought one wounded man after the other to the table. There was sweat on Wilhelmi's brow; the sleeves of his overall were rolled up, and his arms dripped blood; by his side a pail of antiseptic solution, already full of the fingers and toes which the professor had amputated by the dozen.

"The next!" "The next!" "The next!" came untiringly from his mouth.

The room, and the wounded, and the operating-

table, spun round and round before nurse Irene. The massive crucifix that her Catholic colleagues of Aix-la-Chapelle, the Poor Virgins of Jesus-Christ, had fixed to the wall seemed to move, and she fancied that great tears fell from the Saviour's eyes upon the blood-soaked floor.

The next, and again the next.

This was a boy of seventeen that Wilhelmi had under his knife ; he had run away from his father and mother and enlisted as a volunteer. He longed to go ; he would not rest, and at last their only son forsook the form in the Grammar School for the battle-field of Flanders.

A bullet had shattered the collar bone. He whimpered with pain on the table, even before Wilhelmi had put in his knife ; and the professor must extract the splintered bone piece by piece, probing, taking hold with the forceps, cutting with the knife ; and all without chloroform. Wilhelmi did not venture to offer a word of consolation, encouragement, or admonition. He began the terrible work of carving the living, writhing, sentient body.

A shout like the bellow of an injured bull pealed through the room. Wilhelmi was unmoved, and nurse Erica with two hospital orderlies held the agonised boy down on the table.

Nurse Irene was almost fainting, but with the last remnant of her strength she controlled herself ; and in twenty fearful minutes that seemed eternal, Wilhelmi's knife had completed the terrible work. Nurse Irene turned away her eyes. The bandages were ready. Wilhelmi came to her inquiringly.

" And whom do you bring here, nurse Irene ? "

She led him to the Indian and the young Belgian officer.

"Take the Indian, Werter," said Wilhelmi.

"Only—only," stammered the nurse.

"I will see, but it seems to me——"

He was at the operating-table. He loosened all the muscles and sinews that had been left of the Indian's arm near the shoulder. Nurse Irene trembled. The professor must have considered the condition of the other one hopeless, or he would not have occupied himself with the Indian first.

She went up to him, and, while he was sewing, whispered :

"I beg you, professor, I beg you ; save the other one."

"I will see, nurse, but I think——"

"Do save him——"

"I will see——"

She was obliged to accept this reply and wait until he had sewn up the gaping wound under the shoulder of the Indian.

Now Wilhelmi stood before Josua de Kruiz. He felt the pulse and shook his head.

"I am afraid, nurse——"

"I beg you to try, professor !"

"Will you assist me, nurse ?"

"Oh, yes, I will."

"Then put the man on the operating-table."

Two assistants lifted Josua de Kruiz.

CHAPTER IX

THE COMPANY OF THE DEAD

“UNDRESS him,” said Wilhelmi.

Thomas took his knife and cut away the trousers from Josua de Kruiz, who was still lying like dead on the operating-table. Nurse Irene, with trembling fingers, unbuttoned the tunic. The underclothing was one sticky mass of dust and congealed blood ; but Irene remained firm, overcoming her giddiness, and fixing her eyes on the crucifix opposite her. It must be.

“Take care of the man’s papers.”

As though from afar she heard Wilhelmi’s voice, and mechanically took hold of a small bundle of papers, carefully tied with tape, which the wounded man carried in an inner pocket. The clothing was thrown on the floor.

“Nurse Erica, control the pulse.”

Nurse Erica raised the right wrist of Josua de Kruiz.

“I do not find any pulse.”

“You must find it, nurse.”

Wilhelmi had begun to tie up the vessels of the thighs as far as it could be done. The bomb had torn away part of the limb above the knee. The bleeding stumps must be removed, the bones sawn off, and the surface of the wound disinfected

and bandaged ; particles of clothing, dirt, and powder adhered to the torn flesh.

Nurse Irene was scarcely able to bear the sight of those terrible remains of what were once human legs ; but with an effort of will she forced herself, after putting away the papers in a locker, to come back to the table. Wilhelmi inserted his knife and quickly cut away the muscles and the rest of the sinews. The wounded man did not stir ; the drain of blood was beneficial at least in giving him complete unconsciousness.

Wilhelmi shook his head. Nurse Irene could read his face : " It is unnecessary. He will not survive in any case." But the eyes of the nurse sought him, and, answering their petition, he took up the saw.

" You must hold it, nurse Irene. First the left leg."

With a violent effort of her mind nurse Irene seized the left leg of Josua de Kruiz, who yesterday was an entire stranger to her, and yet for whose recovery she was so anxious.

A shudder went through the room. The wounded forgot for the moment their pain ; they became silent, averted their eyes from Wilhelmi, and even the most self-possessed nurses and assistants held their breath and turned away their heads.

Wilhelmi's saw grated through the living bone.

Josua de Kruiz was motionless.

" Thank God," nurse said to herself. " God be praised and thanked."

With iron determination her hand gripped the stump of the leg ; her looks sought the crucifix on the wall and her lips murmured in despair the words from the Cross : " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? "

The saw grated on and finished its work. Wilhelmi applied the antiseptics to the surface of the wound and in a few minutes he was ready.

"Now, may I ask you to take hold of the right leg?" he said to Nurse Irene.

On the point of breaking down, she accomplished the dreadful task for the second time, while all present were mute, and the wounded and dying forgot their own fate in the terrible lot of Josua de Kruiz.

After half an hour Wilhelmi had finished. Nurse Irene, with one of the hospital orderlies, laid the legless body in a bed not unlike a manger in a corner of the room; for all the other beds had long been occupied.

"They laid Him in a manger," she thought.

At that moment a military surgeon came in.

"Professor Wilhelmi?"

"Yes?"

The surgeon explained that it was necessary to operate upon one of the senior officers: a very difficult operation that could be entrusted only to the famous professor's hands. A bullet must be extracted from the abdomen; perforation of the intestines followed by peritonitis was feared.

"I will come at once."

"The motor is at the door, professor. His Excellency is in the School House at Muiderhoofd, that has been turned into a hospital."

"Very good."

"No; I must take you at once, professor."

"I will come now."

"And just as he was, with his overall still stiff with the blood of Josua de Kruiz and the others, Wilhelmi jumped into the car and hastened to Muiderhoofd.

Outside the evening slowly advanced. The sun which had shone on all this indescribable misery sank in the waves of the sea behind the dunes, the black night crept up from the green plains, and far away behind Ypres the thunder of the artillery began anew.

There was a light now in the hospital, the poor light of a few candles and oil-lamps, the flickering flames of which threw grotesque shadows of the beds on floor and ceiling, and seemed to make the crucifix on the wall gigantic.

A sense of deep exhaustion pervaded the room, filled with the smell of carbolic, iodine, and ether. Only here and there arose a low moan or sigh. Sleep and Death crept through the room on soundless feet from bed to bed. Nurse Irene, who was taking the night vigil with the assistant Thomas, stared with fevered eyes at the pale face of Josua de Kruiz, by whose bed of agony she was sitting. They turned to the crucifix on the wall, but at last her gaze wandered to the papers which she had removed from the coat of the wounded man and had taken out of the locker in the middle of the night. She had unfastened the tape which kept the sheets together, and now she read page after page.

In these pages she seemed to discover the real Josua de Kruiz whom she had seen to-day for the first time. And yet he had been so near her in the past, when she was trying to find her way in the night like a somnambulist, but had failed, until the treason wrought by her husband on her friend led her, first to the house of professor Wilhelmi and to the battle-field, and then to the bed of this great poet.

What was it that she read ?

"The Swan-song of Belgium. An epic," was written over these lines, which made one think of the *Iliad*. This is what she read :

"Hail to thee, land of my fathers ! where, over the surge of the ocean,
Gleaming, the chariot of Phoibos encounters the glimmering Hesper ;
Mistress and Mother of craftsmen, beloved of the Nine and Athene,
Pearl on the forehead of Freedom, unrivalled thou standest and peerless.
O that my lips could acclaim thee in measures as high as thy beauty,
Fitly in lyrical measures out-pouring my love and my yearnings,
Soil that my ancestors hallowed, protector and nurse of my childhood,
Blessing my spring-tide of gladness and soothing the griefs of my manhood.
Had I the lyre of the Master, the golden-stringed lyre that he played on,
Struck into thunderous harmonies, chanting the down-fall of Iliion,
Had I the flute of Vergilius, the silver, delicious, appealing,
How would I sing to the ages the fate of my country, my mother,
Tell how upon thee, my country, upborne on the breath of the south wind,
Fell with a blast of destruction the barbarous hordes of the foeman :
Weaponed with horrible weapons, despoiling, malignant, accursed,
Treacherous, breakers of promises, scorers of men and Immortals . . .
Hushed be my faltering accents, my tongue that but stammers thy praises,
Mother, I gird on my falchion ; henceforward I hymn thee with sword-strokes."

Nurse Irene came to herself. Her heart thrilled with indignation, she had spoken aloud the last verses of Josua de Kruiz. There was a movement. Had the wounded man stirred ?

His hand moved feebly over the coverlet of the

bed ; it seemed as if the rhythm of his own verses had recalled him to life.

"Can you hear me ? Are you conscious ?" she asked gently, with suppressed triumph.

The crippled man looked at her vacantly, as if he saw an apparition, not suspecting where he was, and ignorant of what had happened to him. The eyes of the two met : the glowing looks of the nurse and the far-away gaze of the poet, already aloof from all mundane things.

"Go on, go on," breathed Josua de Kruiz.

Nurse Irene understood. She turned again to the pages lying on her lap, but she could not read. Again his faint accents met her ear, low as the whisper of the dying breeze. But her ear, made keen by sorrow and anxiety, caught every murmured word, as the poet's feeble voice, like the moan of the night-wind through the reeds, chanted a song of departing glory, a song that might have been borne up from the lamenting sea.

"Goddess, divine, is it thou, inspiration and pulse of my dreaming
When as a youth I invoked thee and passioned for day in my
darkness ?

Violet-crowned Athens and Ilion and Sparta adored thee and
worshipped,

Laying behest on the heroes of high and immortal achievement.
Goddess and giver of glory, I prayed for thy light and thou
heardest.

Fragrantly fanned me the breath that caressed the fair coast of
my lowlands,

Waft of thy pinions I knew it, a guerdon of strength from the
salt-spray,

Thee I beheld in the heave of the wine-dark and wonderful
waters.

Mist of the autumn descended, the close-woven pall of the aether,
Hushing the fluctuant murmuring ; only the shriek of the sea-bird
Pierced through the vapoury veil as she greedily groped for her
fish-fare ;

Thine was the benison o'er me that moved in the mystical
silence.

Then with a long lamentation, a plaining and wailing of dirges,
Then with a clamorous cry and a roar and a crashing of thunder,
Storm-wind and tempest awakened, the desolate winter was
on me.

Near in the moan of the storm, in the dumb icy darkness yet
nearer,

Heard I, divine one, thy voice; as a Goddess compelling, in-
spiring,

Yet as the Ever-Belovèd, as tenderest mother and sister,

Now art thou near me indeed? Is it thou, whom my heart, ever
craving,

Sought through implacable day and desired through the tene-
brous night-time?"

Josua de Kruiz's voice died away. . . .

He opened his arms as if to embrace Flanders
and his goddess; his outstretched hands touched
the shoulder of the nurse. Wrapt in his fevered
dream he clasped her closely; she had neither the
will nor the power to release herself. Before he
fell back again unconscious on the pillow his lips
moved: "Yes!" he faltered, with ecstasy;
"Yes, it is thou! It is thou!"

CHAPTER X

DEATH ASSAILS THEM ON THE RUSHING STREAM

“It is done.”

From trench to trench this word was passed, from soldier to soldier, without its full meaning being understood. But on the faces of the Belgian, French, and British troops something like relief and relaxation of strain appeared at the sound of this word: “It is done.”

A man of the people, who had been at first a labourer on Flanders' sea-washed coast and afterwards overseer during the building of the dykes, suggested the possibility to the Belgian General staff, and so lit a ray of hope in hearts that had almost despaired. There was a way to pierce the dykes and allow the waters of the North Sea to break through on to the dunes and the plains. No arrangement for the artificial inundation of the country existed, but a way could be found. In this hour of necessity extreme measures might and should be taken. What the result would be none knew at that moment, but on this last effort everything depended.

In former centuries the liberty of the Netherlands was continually endangered by the invasion of foes from all quarters of the compass, and sometimes the only defence of the low plains was to

open the sluices and let in the North Sea, which, always waiting to protect Flanders and Brabant, would pour into the land and take it into irresistible arms. But recourse to this expedient had long ago been prevented by the embankment of the rivers. Yet even now the method was not impossible, but this last means would ask also the last courage and the uttermost determination. The ocean would come, but slowly, irresistibly; and it was necessary to occupy the trenches until it had done its work.

The whole land is honey-combed. Thousands of canals, large and small, of conduits between the dunes and on the meadows, slender threads which as a rule escape attention, creep from north to south, from east to west, through this aqueous country, and, only a short space away from these plains, the tide of the North Sea has brought on the land more than once death and destruction. It was a question of letting it in, not in a sudden, terrific flood which might yet allow a chance, a possibility, of flying; that was no longer possible; but in another way.

The sea should wash and wash on this porous soil until the water of the dunes, like a long serpent, made its way through the land; until the canals were filled and the small dykes and conduits between the dunes and the thin threads of water in the green meadows became like a dilated sponge, from which the moisture still pours out, and which is continually replenished. From the fissures in the earth, mysteriously and without any visible source the water would rise and discharge itself into the trenches of the enemy; the water would rise and rise in these flooded trenches until it mounted over the breasts and shoulders of their occupants;

it would deepen and cover the trenches and the dunes until the whole soaked country became one sea of mud in which horse and rider, gun and carriage, man and machine, sank for ever.

It would take hours and hours; it meant waiting and waiting until the ocean had accomplished the great work of destruction and salvation. This was the tidings which the overseer of the dykes brought, in the dark night of deepest despair. Then this simple man, this saviour, with a detachment of sappers, made his way along the dangerous road under the thunder of the enemy artillery to the coast, to the great dyke which had once been built at a cost of millions against the stormy sea. And there they accomplished the labour of salvation in the night; the great dyke was pierced, and the sea entered in.

Hours of anxious expectation followed; hour after hour; a night, a day, and then another night.

Would the plan succeed? Was the overseer right in his prophecy? Did he know, as he said, the land and the sea with which he had lived from his early youth? Was he mistaken?

In trench after trench, conflict went on, and again long night became day, and another endless day became night. The war of mining and sapping, in the literal sense of the word, proceeded; inch by inch, the soil of Belgium was defended, and was conquered: yet the water of the ocean came not. Was he deceived, after all, the man who came to render this last service to a despoiled and bleeding Fatherland?

The infantry were engaged; artillery was brought supposed to be irresistible. But no effort could dislodge the conquerors: With overpowering

strength they maintained their stand, and the liberating waters came not.

Was it a dream, a dream of hope, the tidings which the overseer brought to the officers and the General Staff?

While the men went on with their duty, while they offered their breasts to the enemy's projectiles, whilst their lines grew thinner from hour to hour, the ear of their heart was pressed to the bosom of the bleeding Fatherland, listening, listening. Would it come? Would it not come? Was that it, gurgling and bubbling? Was that the water from the mysterious depths which would put the enemy to flight and drown him?

Would it never come?

The imaginations of the soldiers flew to the coast where the sea surf played against the dunes, where British dreadnoughts, ready to help, were lying within range off Dunkirk. Only a corner of the tortured country belonged still to its defenders, and one hundred and fifty thousand men waited for the moment when this last corner should sink in the sea.

Was that indeed a lapping in the mysterious depths as of tongues which lisp and murmur of deliverance, which whisper, "We are coming. We are coming. The old ocean who was always your friend has come to your help and will drown your enemy"? Was it the cunning serpent, which, wriggling and curving through the porous soil, had at last lifted its head and signalled with the jewel light of liberation?

As if moved by an unknown impulse the men in the trenches drew closer and closer to each other. Could it be true, or were they deceiving themselves? It seemed as though from hour to

hour their feet become colder; as if the ground little by little gave way; they were standing on water; they were standing in it.

"It is coming. . . ." "It is coming. . . ." "It is coming. . . ."

One said it to another: presently thousands were whispering it.

Forgetting the danger of exposing themselves to the flying bombs, the men pulled off their boots and lifted up their wetted feet to show the progress of the flood.

The enemy went on firing. He seemed to know nothing of the gigantic opponent now rising against him to his inevitable destruction, who would force him to relinquish and flee from the last corner of Flanders.

Did the enemy suspect nothing yet?

From moment to moment the water in the trenches rose; visibly it rose, and joy flooded all hearts. The land was permeated with the water of the ocean; from the depths of its heart it poured the welling flood into the trenches.

Hands were so icy cold that it seemed scarcely possible any longer to grasp a rifle; legs were almost too numb to stand; but the men fought on. Did not the enemy know it yet, gurgling and running, and murmuring, and lapping, and spreading, in the deep earth of the Fatherland?

The water was waist-deep: the trenches were half full. At last the enemy, through the fury of continuously renewed attacks, seemed to understand that something unsuspected, something incomprehensible was near—was upon them.

They had been accustomed to cold and wet during all the fearful weeks in Flanders—but what was this? The unending rain that fell for days and

nights had no such effect as this. This was more than the water filtered through the soil of this confounded country, half water itself. This was something more, something different; the water rose, and rose, and rose.

Round waist and arms lapped the horrible, dark brown broth mixed with clay and earth; icy cold, making the heart quake, threatening death; ready to drown its prey like a mad dog that men have thrown into the river.

From moment to moment the water rose, deeper and deeper still it became, yet they did not understand. They did not dream that it was the ocean which had risen through the veins and arteries of Flanders to liberate the country it loves, the country which it possesses, which it will allow no one else to take.

Certainly such possibility had been imagined, but none seriously believed in it; it was always dismissed as a fairy tale.

The water rose and rose. . . . Now it was breast-high, and was licking the rifle-barrels. The North Sea was out.

They did not believe it.

Behind the trenches, notwithstanding the hail of artillery under which hundreds were falling, the men at the command of their officers were bringing bundle after bundle of straw, wood, boards pulled from barracks, anything they could seize. Still they supposed it water from the soil, and thought that the trenches might be dried and still held.

But, little as they suspected it, the North Sea was out.

The waters rose and rose; now they were shoulder-high and were becoming irresistible.

Wood and straw and boards were lifted up and carried off like children's playthings. Everything floated away on the dark tide that had now risen to the lips of the doomed men. They could fire no more.

Rifles went down in the brown flood that had mounted until the heads and helmets of the infantry were hardly visible above the water.

From the Belgian line firing had ceased. The trenches had been emptied. The defenders of Flanders had retired: the enemy began to mass themselves in order. Night rose on the liquefying plain.

The green plain became alive like quicksilver. Street and road and meadow, canal and ditches and streamlet dissolved into one level sheet of water, gleaming in the first rays of the moon.

The sacred soil of Flanders had returned to the maternal lap of Amphitrite.

The flight began; the flight over and through the water. Regiment after regiment struggled through the water coldly looked down on by the moon. No road, no path as far as the eye could reach. Only here and there a house, or a mill, or a lofty tree, standing above the dark, yet glittering plain of water; the delusive surface covered so many rivers and canals, so many traps and pitfalls for the enemy of Flanders.

The flight became general, became a *débâcle*, and still the water rose, and rose, and rose.

CHAPTER XI

THE SADNESS OF HIS LAMENT

THE water rose up to the ridge of the low dune on which stood the field-hospital, and, as the pale light of a winter morning shone in at the windows, the water was lapping the entrance of the building.

Wilhelmi had not returned, and the hospital orderlies and the nurses had only just perceived the menacing danger. In great haste they began to make arrangements to leave the hospital, and to load the wounded on whatever vehicles might be available. Perhaps they could find a way through the flowing water and come to dry land somewhere, somehow, by fleeing to the east.

Nurses and soldiers began the difficult task; their hands toiled with superhuman strength. Only one stood aloof—nurse Irene. She was kneeling in the remotest corner of the hospital, gazing at the crucifix on the wall, and listening with strained ear to the fevered visions of the dying Josua de Kruiz.

His delirium had reached a climax; recovery was no longer possible. The poet of Flanders and Brabant was dying. His wandering mind voiced itself in lyrical words; it seemed as though the feelings and thoughts of his whole life were concentrated in these last words: nurse Irene listened and listened. While the doors of the

hospital were thrown open and one wounded man after another was hurried into the waiting vehicles, she hung upon his lips.

Nurse Irene was no longer conscious of the outer world. She saw nothing of the flood rippling under the sharp autumn wind and rising higher and higher up the walls of corrugated iron. She saw nothing of this streamlet, at first small but continually increasing, which poured into the hospital and crept up to the manger in which, in default of a bed, the maimed body of Josua de Kruiz was laid. With one hand she held the right hand of the poet, with the other she grasped the sheets covered with his verses; and while the others bent to their work she listened to the voice of Josua de Kruiz that murmured on unheard, unnoticed by any but herself.

Josua de Kruiz was repeating verses. Like the sound of the far-away bells of Vineta drowned in the ocean, his voice chimed on, and to Irene his words seemed to sum up in themselves the fate of Belgium:

“Thou wert strong as a young lion, my country; thy loins were of steel, and thy limbs like the wood of the cedar, and thy claws were hardened in fire. But in the night came the foe, my country, and destroyed the strength of thy loins; he broke thy claws and made them blunt like the teeth of a saw, which the woodmen hang on a withered branch for rusted iron.

“Blossoms and garlands were thy fields, my country; gems of price thy cities; thy villages were like the roses which the summer weaves into the green of his festal robe.

“But the foe came, my country; and on thy fields he sprinkled the blood of thy children, so that

the verdant meadows became red like the purple wine pressed out of the ripened grape ; he burned thy cities, that they became black like the ruins of Nineveh and fallen Babel ; he beat down thy villages so that no stone remained on another, and they were like a bare bush from which the November wind has stripped the last leaves.

“ The bosoms of thy mothers and virgins, my land, were like armed towers ; they were full of beauty and sweetness ; the mother’s breast gave abundance of milk, nourishment, life to thy sucklings.

“ But the foe came, my country ; he cut off the breasts of thy mothers and maidens, raising them in mockery on the point of his lance. And the sucklings, the hope of thy future, withered away in hunger and thirst and shame.

“ Thou hadst churches and palaces, my country. Thy skilful men created a new world on the cloth embroidered with coloured thoughts ; thy halls were full of the wonders of past centuries.

“ But the foe came, my country ; and he tore down thy towers, and churches, and thy palaces ; he rent the tapestries embroidered with coloured thoughts.

“ Thou wast robbed of thy manhood, my country ; thou hast become emasculated among the lands of the earth. O my country, my tears of blood fall on thee, for I love thee, my country.

“ I love thee in the robe of shame that thou wearest ; with the crown of thorns on thy head and the ashes on thy locks.

“ Doubly and trebly do I love thee, for thy suffering, thy pains, for thy wrongs, which are more grievous than the wrongs of any other land.

“Thou wast small, but thou hast become the greatest among the small; thou art raised to the right hand of the God of our forefathers, to whom thou dost appeal to judge between thee and thy foe, my country.

“How fair thou wast, my country! the bride of my youth and the wife of my silent hope.

“Thy sons and thy daughters walked with the wreath of flowering spring, the immortal crown of eternal fame on their heads, through the streets of thy cities on the sea.

“Thy ships brought thee garments worked with gold from the coasts of the Orient; pearls and emeralds from the rivers and mountains of Ind; amber and rich unguents from the ends of the East; the procession of thy ships on the seas was like the procession of the three kings who followed the star. O my country, wast thou not an immortal child, joyous and glad? Laughter like music rang from thy flower-like bosom, and I heard thy laughter and kept it in my heart.

“Like a girl who adorns herself for the dance on the day of the high festival, thou didst bind on thy brow, radiant in the sunlight, the blue band of the sea, bringing blessing and refreshment.

“To thousands of strangers thou didst offer healing and strength, and they found rest and peace in thy arms.

“O my beloved country, thrice stricken and battered by the treacherous foe. Faithlessness and treason and lies, he desired to stamp like a brand on thy brow.

“But the crown of thorns which thou bearest and the blood that drips on thy forehead efface the brand.

“The stamp of disgrace marks the brow of thy

enemies ; they shall go about branded amongst all the nations of this earth for ever.

“ ‘ For this shall be their punishment,’ says the Lord thy God. ‘ I will mark them with the mark of Cain, so that they shall be known among all men, and all men shall turn from them. They shall be strangers on the earth wherever they go, and their track shall be avoided and accursed.’ ”

At these words the voice of Josua de Kruiz became clearer. He made an effort to sit up, he essayed to lift himself out of the manger in which he lay like an infant.

Nurse Irene tried to support him, but he fell back powerless and senseless.

She raised the exhausted head, and once his voice rang out, while the liberating sea rippled round the boards on which he lay.

“ I would sing the song of thy greatness and beauty ; I would sing a song of thy suffering, of thy pains and of thy destruction, my beloved country.

“ But, as I bore thy banner in my hand, the thunder-bolt broke above my head, the clouds of the west darkened my vision ; I knew the thrust of the foeman’s lance and the water and the blood flowed from my wound ; and it was well.”

Nurse Irene gazed at the dying man in awe. All that she had seen, all that she had read, were mingled in this sacred hour. She no longer knew what she saw or heard or dreamed, for the broken body of Josua de Kruiz, given for his country, grew for her into a symbol. Her eye fell on the black crucifix on the wall, and she saw the dying man’s body extend itself in death. He bowed his head as if he breathed, “ Father, into Thy hands——” and in her heart she repeated the words, “ My body

which is given for you ; My blood which is shed for you——”

Dazed, nurse Irene stared in front of her. The waters lapped and gurgled round her feet, but she neither saw nor heard. Was the man lying there alive or dead ? She dared not touch him to convince herself. She could only repeat the words, “My body, which is given for you ; my blood which is shed for many, unto the remission of sins.”

Suddenly she threw herself upon his body and began to sob. Her loosened hair fell in long strands over the death-pale face of Josua de Kruiz, wet with her tears. It was as if she anointed his head, as that other woman did the feet of the Saviour ; as if she dried his face, dewed with blood and sweat, with the hair of the Magdalen.

“By the love that at the feet of Thy sacred Son . . . ,” her lips murmured. She held the cold, maimed, distorted body in her soft, warm, strong arms, and stammered with trembling lips, “given for you, shed for you unto the remission of sins.”

CHAPTER XII

“ IT IS FINISHED ”

“ FLY, nurse Irene ! ”

The pale face of the assistant Thomas, his features sharpened by the fear of imminent death, appeared in the doorway. No reply. Nurse Irene heard nothing.

“ The water is already over three feet high on the ridge of the dune. Nurse Irene, the last wagon is driving away.”

No reply. Nurse Irene heard nothing. Though his own life was in jeopardy, he made a last effort. He rushed into the hospital, seized the nurse's arm, and tried to drag her out.

“ Leave me alone ! Do not touch me. I am sacred.”

The assistant was astounded. He stared into Irene's face, and he comprehended the dreadful truth. Stark madness glared from those starting eyes. The horror of these terrible days had overthrown her reason. Once more he called upon her.

“ Come, nurse ! For the love of God ! ”

With an insane burst of laughter she shrieked in a tone such as the assistant had never heard, and prayed never to hear again :

“ For the love of God ! ”

The assistant shuddered, but he could not neglect his duty. Again he endeavoured to draw her towards the door.

"Come with me, nurse Irene. Come now!"

Already they were up to their knees in the water which was now flowing strongly. For a moment Irene seemed to understand.

"Save him! Save him!" she exclaimed loudly.

Thomas was startled.

"Save whom, nurse? Save whom? This wounded man? But he is dead."

She looked at the assistant with lunatic surprise.

"No, he is not dead. He cannot be dead. He dare not die: he is immortal," she cried, ecstatically.

"Come, nurse. You must come."

Deciding that he must bring her out by force, he took hold of her with his strong arms, but madness gave her superhuman strength, and she was more powerful than the amazed orderly. She seemed to have the strength of a giant.

"For God's sake, come!"

They were wrestling in the midst of the swirling flood. The assistant ran the risk of falling on the floor, slippery with the yellow water, of being kept under by her, and so perishing—and the will to live conquered his resolution.

"I am going to save him. Let me be!" the nurse cried.

"But he is dead. You cannot save him."

She laughed wildly.

"He lives! He lives!" she joyfully exclaimed.

The flood poured in through the wall of the hospital, and outside the last car drove off.

"They are going!"

The only reply was a peal of raving laughter. Hastily relinquishing his hold of her, the assistant fled from the room. He was obliged to put forth his powers to catch up with the departing wagon which, in this expanse of waters, represented the only means left of saving his life.

Nurse Irene remained immovable. Presently she tried to raise the body of Josua de Kruiz; she must save this sacred body from the flood. She succeeded in lifting the corpse and held it high over the water. The last wagon was far away. She waited, holding the body.

"He shall not be drowned. He shall not be drowned," she crooned, her eyes fixed on the cross.

The same strength that enabled her to resist the strong arms of Thomas enabled her to resist fatigue. Her muscles seemed rigid as steel. Hours passed; still she stood holding the body over the water, and still the flood rose.

The woman seemed to have become marble. And like the pealing of bells and the swelling chant of choirs there seemed to sound over the water, already breast-high,

*"Stabat mater dolorosa,
Juxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat Filius."*

With iron arms nurse Irene raised the sacrificed body towards the heavens.

Long ago the wintry sun had reached its zenith. Now it was sinking, and the first shades of night brooded over the land transformed into a dusky waste of waters. Still Irene stood motionless, holding on high the body of Josua de Kruiz. Still

her eyes were steadfastly fixed on the cross, and during those last moments there rose before her the most wonderful vision of her life.

The cross grew larger; it over-topped the hospital; it became colossal, illimitable. Its vast shadow fell over the plain of moving waters; fell over Belgium, over Europe, over the world. Beneath the cross she stood, she, Irene, holding the wounded body of Josua de Kruiz. The water reached her shoulders. Still she held the sacrificed body high over the torrent.

"For you, for you." Her failing mind could only hold those words.

Nothing was heard but the soft lapping of the flood, and over the flood towered the cross. From the wintry sky of Flanders the stars looked serenely down. There shone out that star which two thousand years ago lighted the way of the three kings to the fields of Bethlehem. Through the window Irene's fixed eyes searched the wide waters that heaved under the silvery light of the moon. Her eye sought for the star and found it. She raised the maimed body higher.

"For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people: For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Suddenly she staggered, fell headlong, and with her the body of Josua de Kruiz.

Night was upon Flanders. Night was laid upon the eyes of Irene. The stars glittered over the width of waters that covered Flanders' plains.

Under the softly heaving surface of those waters slept a hundred and twenty thousand of those who had been foes and had become friends—in the slumber of eternity.

A hundred and twenty thousand: an entire army.

Silently the waters had closed over them for ever. And silently and softly the waters closed over Irene and Josua de Kruiz.

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